By Jo Collins Mathis

News Staff Reporter

If Vassilis Lambropoulos feels at home walking up the steps and past the Greek columns of Angell Hall toward his office, it only makes sense.

As director and professor of modern Greek and Comparative Literature, he’s part of both worlds at the University of Michigan.

“Although I remain a passionate Athenian, I chose to come here and never regretted it because when it comes to an academic environment that fosters originality, collaboration and reflection, there’s nothing better in the world than the American campus,” said Lambropoulos, who has shared enthusiasm in a melodic Greek accent.

Although he misses the beauty of Greece and the large-scale, passionate political environment of the people, he feels very fortunate to have daily access to both cultures.

“I can have an American life while carrying with me my European experiences and being able to renew these experiences every day,” he said. “And especially in a very cosmopolitan environment like Ann Arbor, you can really combine the best of say, in my case, Greece, and the U.S. in the most fertile ways.”

His specialty is modern Greek literature and culture of the last three centuries. His audience is anyone on campus with historical, geographical or cultural interest in Greek life, including those suddenly fascinated with the Olympic Games.

“What is very special about modern Greece is that it focuses on present manifestations on a culture that is 3,000 years old,” he said. “Therefore, it gives people a chance to see how tradition works, how a culture can go through turmoil, through success, through crisis, and survive in the modern world.”

And therefore, whenever we ask ourselves, What does the future hold for Greece? For our nation? For our faith? The example of modern Greece gives a wonderful case study for how traditions and cultures operate and what it takes for them to survive.

Sean Norton, program assistant for the Modern Greek program, says Lambropoulos is an incredibly generous employer and a "ready-witted force" guiding this program.

"He is superb at setting the agenda of the program by combining his deep intellect and his inventiveness when it comes to courses, symposia, talks, guests, gatherings of students and faculty," Norton said.

"I’ve been told by his students in that rapt way a student manages when they feel their university experience was truly and verifiably unique — how much Vassilis made it exciting to go to class, how inspired they were by his lectures and his obvious love for the material." Norton added.

Born and raised in Athens, Lambropoulos came to the United States in 1961, and taught at Ohio State for 18 years before moving up to Michigan.

"Of course, people from Michigan love to hear that because they say they saved the light," he said. "I moved in the right direction." Although he has been teaching in the Midwest and thinks it’s underrated.

He calls working at U-M "an absolutely stellar experience." It’s a unique campus in the country in that it combines a mission with a scholarly mission, a sense of public responsibility with a sense of research responsibility," he said. "All of us — faculty, teachers, staff — feel we are contributing to education, contributing to public culture, and at the same time learning new things about life, about humanity, about human creativity. And we also have unique respect for each other. It doesn’t happen on every campus, but it happens every day everywhere on this one.”

He came to the United States to be part of an academic community which is the most advanced and innovative in the world, he said. He met his wife, Artemis Leonitis, daughter Daphne, 16, a junior at Huron High School.

Outside interests: "There is no outside or inside; it all connects." Best thing about being on U-M faculty: "Creative synergy among students, faculty and community."