“This posed a huge ethical dilemma for me because I loved the taste of meat,” he remembers.

Worried that a vegetarian diet meant giving up his enjoyment of food, the budding chef experimented at home, determined to outdo the meaty flavors he’d come to love by using spices, herbs, and sauces. “Flavor was so important and I learned early on [how] to get these ... layers into my cooking.” As a young man, he learned about restaurant cooking while tending bar, and he later opened Horizons Café, which quickly developed a dedicated following.

Landau’s culinary journey ultimately led to Vedge, the downtown Philly restaurant he and his wife, Kate Jacoby, opened in 2011. Seasonal vegetable dishes like tandoor-spiced cauliflower and grilled brussels sprouts in smoked mustard sauce attract customers from near and far. Philadelphia Magazine’s food editor described a radish dish as “not just delicious but revelatory.” In 2013, the magazine named Vedge one of the city’s top three restaurants. That same year, Landau won the Food Network’s competitive cooking show Chopped. He and Jacoby have cooked for Bill Clinton, and their recently published Vedge cookbook is garnering acclaim from chefs and home cooks alike.

For Landau, success is simply watching faces light up as people bite into his sweet potato pâté, eggplant braciole, or other signature dishes. That was his goal when opening Vedge. “I wanted them to say, this is a great meal and it doesn’t matter that there wasn’t any meat in anything.”

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