

FOOD AND DRINK

# This James Beard Award Finalist in San Antonio Is Serving Up the Most Exciting Old Fashioned in Texas

Chef Steve McHugh's latest restaurant, Landrace, explores the Texas terroir.

By [Mariah Tyler](#) | Published on June 18, 2022

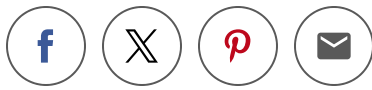


PHOTO: JOSH HUSKIN

[Landrace](#) is local. It's not only the name, but also the concept upon which the newest restaurant from chef Steve McHugh, a James Beard Awards finalist, is built. Landrace "means a traditional variety of species, be that plant or animal. Landraces can be heritage, heirloom, and/or native, but they can also refer to something that has adapted extremely well to its environment. So, for

that just survives, but thrives," he explained to *Travel + Leisure*.

McHugh himself has managed to adapt and thrive as a Wisconsin-born, New Orleans-trained, Texas-based chef. He understands Texas cuisine — and has figured out how to combine it with outside influences to deliver some truly exceptional plates. The San Antonio-based chef made a name for himself with [Cured at Pearl](#) in 2013 and has since earned the recognition of being a James Beard finalist six times.



PHOTO: KATHY TRAN

The experience at Landrace, opened in 2021 at [Thompson San Antonio](#), is warm and inviting: with cozy seating, dark walls, and moody lighting, there is no bad seat in the house. If you're a food enthusiast, sitting at the chef's bar is the best way to see what's really going on in the kitchen — and, in this case, the wood-fired, stainless-steel grill.



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"Cooking in the most natural form complements our concept of preparing dishes with indigenous produce. When guests sit down for dinner, they can actually see steak being charred and the fish being seared. Not only do you smell the mesquite when you walk in, but you see it too," McHugh said.



PHOTO: KATHY TRAN



flour for our crackers and bread, we wanted to celebrate local ingredients in creative ways. Being situated within the Thompson Hotel, I love that we are able to share an authentic taste of a place with visitors who may not otherwise realize the true range of Texas cuisine," McHugh said.

The seasonal menu ties in ingredients from 20 Texas growers, including Arbequina olives pressed for olive oil, edible flowers, habanero peppers, and cabrito (young roasted goat). This dedication and attention to detail and locally sourced ingredients is also evident in the most exciting option from the drinks menu: the restaurant's Old Fashioned bar cart.

Order an Old Fashioned, and a friendly bartender will roll a giant cart to the table and ask what you'd like in it. Feel free to experiment or ask for an expert recommendation. For spring and summer, McHugh recommends adding a light twist with a house-made syrup like the grapefruit oleo or brown sugar pineapple. If the bartender asks if you'd like an ice stamp, say yes. The fun and frivolous option will have your ice cube hot-stamped with the word "chill," the letters instantly highlighted by the brightly colored syrup.



PHOTO: COURTESY OF LANDRACE

effort he put into all four is obvious. Success and recognition from James Beard doesn't come without such effort, after all. For example, he explains, "the charcuterie plate at Cured utilizes recycled paper from old menus that is cut into a specific shape, holding in place the jar of pork fat. And furthermore, the details of the jar are also considered [and] chosen because of its specific size and design. Every component of the table setting or presentation on the plate has been thought through thoroughly with consideration to sustainability, color, and functionality."



PHOTO: SCOTT MARTIN

Cured — the restaurant which earned this year's James Beard nomination — is focused around charcuterie and fermentation. Located in the historic Pearl Brewery administrative building, built in 1904, the focal point upon entry is a large curing case full of butchered meats.

When asked for his tips for making the perfect charcuterie board at home, McHugh said: "It's best to share a balance of salty and sweet, acidic, and vinegary selections so you can appeal to a wide range of flavor preferences. The vessel is also important... at Cured, we offer bread made with a touch of



mustards and marmalades to either complement or contrast with the meat. Along with sauces, fruit like candied pumpkin or dried cherries bring a new and interesting component to the plate. And don't forget Champagne — dry bubbles are the perfect palate cleanser."



PHOTO: COURTESY OF CURED

Inspired by San Antonio's "incredible culinary history and appreciation for food that is ingrained in the way people approach the cuisine they enjoy each day," McHugh has brought an invitingly casual air to elevated dining in the city while highlighting what's to love about Texas cuisine.

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