When Marko Davinic came to the United States from Serbia in 1998, the then-high school student figured he would eventually become a dentist. But after earning a pre-dentistry degree at Northwestern State University in Louisiana, Davinic found himself not in dental school but in graduate school studying microbiology. At Texas Tech University in Lubbock, he investigated the astoundingly versatile human pathogen, *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*, at the university’s Health Sciences Center. From there, he tackled an even more complex subject—the universe of microbes in soil.

He now holds three advanced degrees (none dental-related): a master’s in microbiology, an MBA, and a Ph.D. in soil microbiology, which he completed in 2012. Where is he now? *Soil Horizons* recently caught up with him to find out.

**Soil Horizons**: So, you planned to go into dentistry but got turned onto research instead?

**Davinic**: Yes, my brother is actually a dentist. But even he is into [oral] bacteria, and he did some research as well. So I always liked research more than dentistry—getting into people’s mouths (laughs). I also had microbiology in high school in Serbia, so I was really into it since then.

**Soil Horizons**: What fascinates you so much about microorganisms?

**Davinic**: I like their diversity and their ability to adapt to anything and everything. *Pseudomonas*, for example, is a really amazing pathogen and has a lot of diversity just by itself. It can be a pathogen of humans or plants. And it’s always in soil.

But working with one organism is totally different from thinking about all bacteria in soil. *Pseudomonas* is amazing, but then I started thinking: how will it react when there are so many other bacteria around it in this setting? Soil is such a complex setting. You have pockets of air, and soil aggregates of different sizes with different nutrients inside them. I like to think about each aggregate as a small planet that can harbor totally different communities of bacteria.

**Soil Horizons**: You also grow bacteria and fungi as a hobby, right?

**Davinic**: Yes, I do it at my house. Right now I’m in a fungi mode. During the last year of my Ph.D., I started growing pink oyster mushrooms. I grow them and I like to eat them. They taste like bacon—full of protein. But also they’re nematode trappers in soil, and they can degrade anything, really. They can degrade terrestrial oil spills, for example, into forms of carbon that are non-toxic. Afterward, you can actually use the soil as potting soil. I have mushrooms right now starting to grow, and I would like to mix them up with different ratios of soil and oil because I’m in North Dakota, and we have a lot of oil drilling here.

**Soil Horizons**: What are you doing in North Dakota?

**Davinic**: I work for a company, Western Ag. Toward the end of my Ph.D., I had a job offer from a company in Lubbock, and I almost accepted it. But then, I had met the CEO of Western Ag at the [Soil Science Society of America] Annual Meetings in San Antonio, TX, in 2011, and then I met him again at the 2012 Annual Meetings in Cincinnati. And in Cincinnati, he actually gave me an offer. Yes,