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A TOAST TO CULINARY DIPLOMACY

Earlier this year, as US presidential hopefuls proved their mettle at the Iowa Caucus, across the globe a political imbroglio between French President François Hollande and Iranian leader Hassan Rouhani drew headlines of its own. Rouhani's request that no wine be served at a presidential luncheon on his then-forthcoming European tour did not go over well with the French.

While the Italians obliged his request, going so far as to cover up potentially risqué nude statues on display at an event he was to attend, Hollande opted to cancel their tête-à-tête since the French simply do not lunch sans wine. "Winegate," as the Internet playfully dubbed the ensuing controversy, is what Sam Chapple-Sokol calls "culinary diplomacy gone awry."

"Food is a powerful, visceral and captivating way for each of us to connect," says the culinary diplomacy scholar. "As

such, food is a very important component to relationships among heads of state and diplomats. The food on the table, the place settings, the wine served (or not served) is vital to create an opportunity for good working relationships, open lines of communication, and sometimes friendships."

Ironically, the French, Chapple-Sokol asserts, have engaged in culinary diplomacy or "the use of food and cuisine as tools to create cross-cul-

tural understanding in the hopes of improving interactions and cooperation" for centuries. Only in recent years, with globalization and the growing popularity of food culture, has the concept spurred conversation among academics, chefs and government officials.

From official dinners at the White House to peace-building pop-up cafés in London to public diplomacy campaigns like Thailand's "Thai Kitchen of the World," which successfully increased the number of Thai restaurants using the country's products worldwide, culinary diplomacy takes place at various levels; all of which Chapple-Sokol has researched and participated in to varying degree since his immersion in this burgeoning field.

While pursuing his master's degree at the Fletcher School of Law and Diploma-

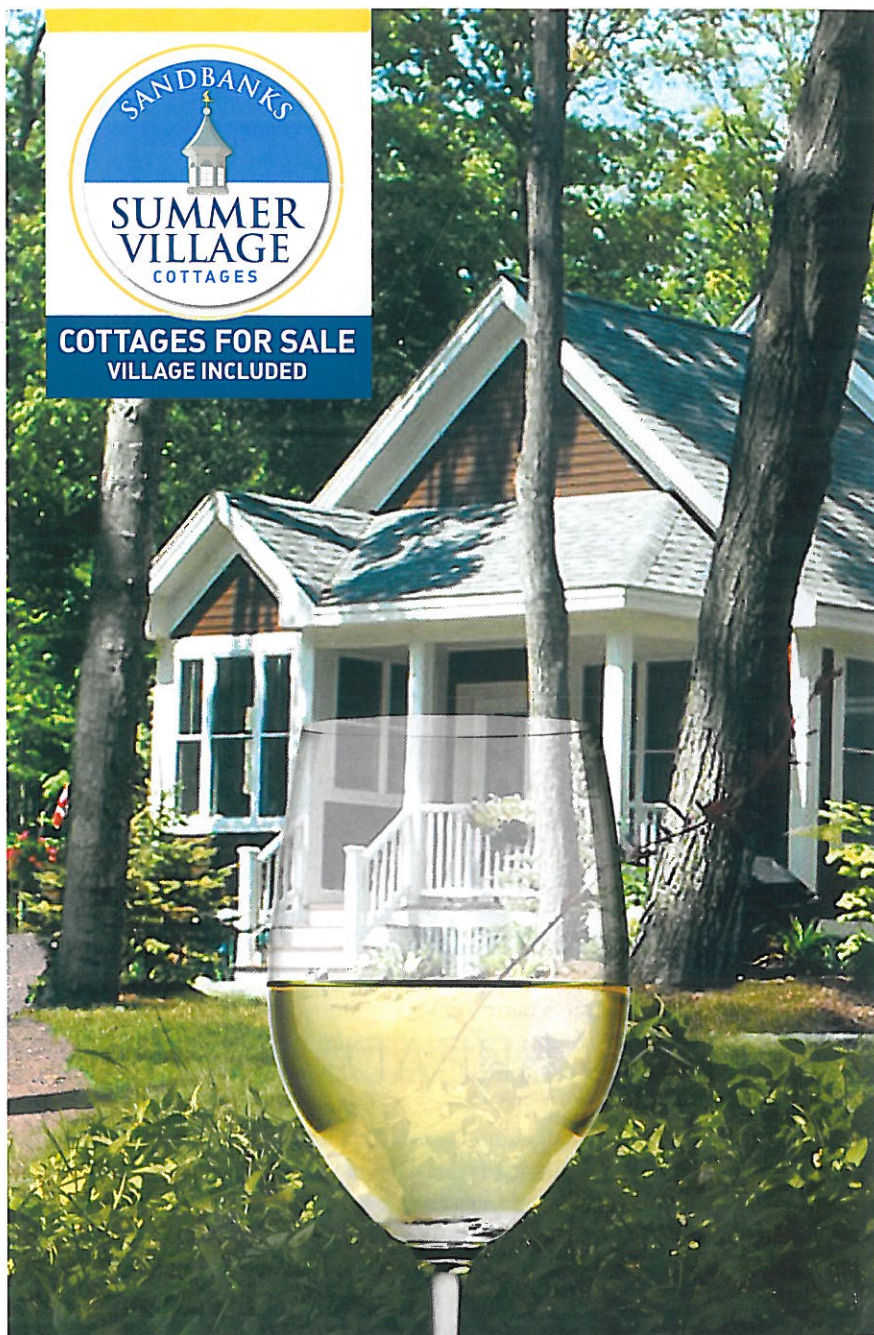
cy at Tufts University in Medford, Massachusetts, the political science graduate combined his interest in diplomacy with his affinity for the culinary arts, the latter of which he had acquired as a child.

“Both of my parents cook a lot at home, so I grew up helping them in the kitchen and learning from them,” recalls Chapple-Sokol. “I even did some week-long cooking camps when I was like nine or 10 [years old] – I distinctly remember learning to make sushi, baklava and traditional French sauces.”

His resulting thesis, titled “Culinary Diplomacy: Breaking Bread to Win Hearts and Minds,” draws on in-person interviews with former White House executive pastry chef William Yosses, renowned Spanish-American chef José Andrés and Paul Rockower, another leading expert on culinary diplomacy, and was later published in *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*.

Since then, Chapple-Sokol has helped Andrés create a course about food and society at George Washington University, led Le Club des Chefs des Chefs (the Club of Chefs of Heads of State) on a tour of the Eastern US, and worked as a pastry chef at the White House. It’s an off-kilter career path befitting a rich and multifaceted field still in its infancy, a field Chapple-Sokol also promotes through speaking engagements, culinarydiplomacy.com (his website on the subject), and most recently *The Culinary Citizen*, a podcast available on iTunes, which explores the nexus between gastronomy and international affairs.

As a cheesemonger at San Francisco’s Mission Cheese, an artisanal cheese bar specializing in American farmhouse cheese, local wines and beers, Chapple-Sokol makes most in-house products, including desserts (think a Gouda chocolate-chip cookie), acting as an ambassador for American food all the while indulging in the pastime that started it all. “I love to cook, so I’ll always keep one hand in the mixing bowl. ✦



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