

## South African winery moving to new HQ in downtown High Point

*By Owen Covington  
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Rickety Bridge Winery of South Africa has purchased a downtown High Point building as its new U.S. headquarters as it continues to expand distribution here.

The real estate deal comes a little more than a year after the winery, one of South Africa's oldest, began distributing in North Carolina and building a client list among the Triad's upscale restaurants and wine retailers.

"We just want to bring something different to High Point," said Andrew Woolgar, CEO of Rickety Bridge Winery USA.

Rickety Bridge purchased the former Legacy Leather showroom at 518 N. Hamilton St. for \$315,000 last week, and is currently having the 11,000-square-foot building renovated to serve as its office and a distribution center, with plans to move into finished space in July.

Located on the western cape of South Africa, Rickety Bridge is a boutique winery purchased in 2000 by British entrepreneur Duncan Spence that now produces about 300,000 cases of wine a year.

Beyond South Africa, Rickety Bridge distributes in England, Belgium, the Netherlands, Scandinavia and China, and as of April 2015, North Carolina.

Both Spence and Woolgar have ties to the Old North State and the Triad — Woolgar's wife is originally from Lexington, and Spence's girlfriend is a Reidsville native.

That helped make North Carolina a natural fit for the start of U.S. distribution, as "both of us have spent quite a lot of time here in the state," Woolgar said.

Rickety Bridge's approach hasn't been to rely on the mass marketing of its wine, with Woolgar instead reaching out to local restaurants and wine retailers to introduce them to the wine and encourage them to offer it.

"We're very focused on looking for places that respect the product," Woolgar said.

"We're not in the business of selling to supermarkets or Costco or something like that. ... We're not in the business to try to conquer the U.S. with our wine. We're keeping the product most importantly fresh and of high quality instead of going in the direction of quantity and losing sight of the brand."

The winery boasts 18 varietals, with retail prices ranging from about \$15 for a bottle of chenin blanc to up to \$100 for its flagship cabernet sauvignon.

During its first year in the U.S., Rickety Bridge has made headway in getting onto the wine lists of a broad range of Triad restaurants, including Mozelle's in Winston-Salem, 1618 Seafood Grille in Greensboro and the J.H. Adams Inn in High Point.

It counts Sedgefield Country Club, High Point Country Club and Grandover Resort among its clients and Potent Potables in Jamestown, Zeto Wine Shop in Greensboro and Wine Merchants Gourmet as retailers carrying its varieties.

Woolgar said Rickety Bridge is now shipping about 8,500 bottles to the U.S. each quarter, with a focus on creating a broader N.C. distribution network.

"We have the capacity at the winery to increase our footprint here in the U.S.," Woolgar said. "Slowly but surely — it's not going to be a rushed thing."

Woolgar is also looking to work with other High Point companies, such as partnering with furniture makers to offer space within the new headquarters on North Hamilton to show off products during the market.

Rickety Bridge has also offered three used wine barrels to Brown Truck Brewery, the city's newest brewery, to use in making special barrel-aged brews.

"People are now on the lookout for our wines," Woolgar said. "It's taken us a year to get that established, but customers are now calling us very regularly."