

Steve Jamison's Blue Sole Shoes has become the go-to place for fashionable men's footwear. "We have shoes that cause you to stand out in a good way," he says, "and distinguish yourself from the guy next door or the guy sitting in the same office as you."

# A Step Above

At Blue Sole Shoes, owner **Steve Jamison** has created a destination for fine men's footwear and other fashions that customers are not likely to find elsewhere

By **Matt Cosentino**  
Photography by **Jeff Anderson**

If the clothes make the man, as the old saying goes, then how does the right pair of shoes factor into the equation? For Steve Jamison, owner of Blue Sole Shoes on Chestnut Street, fine footwear doesn't just complete the outfit; it also stands out on its own and says a lot about a person's style and personality. It's this philosophy that has helped his boutique become the go-to place for fashionable men's footwear in the area.

"That's our specialty," says Jamison, who has more than 25 years of industry experience. "It's not just for guys going out at night, either. It's for the guy who wants a classic look but also wants something unique. That's what I do. I offer uniqueness and exclusivity. I offer things they're not going to find anywhere else."

A Philadelphia native, Jamison has had a passion for fashion since childhood and knew at an early age that he wanted to pursue a career in the field. "I've always wanted to own my own store, ever since I was a kid," he says. "I caught the bug after getting my first pair of fashion shoes. I liked the reaction I got from people, just them liking the way I looked."

Jamison's first part-time job in high school was at a shoe store, and he continued to work at various department stores and smaller shops through his college days at the University of Pittsburgh. After moving home to Philadelphia, he landed a job at a boutique for men's footwear and stayed there for 16 years, until its closing. While it meant he was out of a job, the closing of that store turned out to be a blessing in disguise. It gave Jamison the impetus to fulfill his dream, and one year later he opened Blue Sole Shoes. The store continues to thrive six and half years later at 18th and Chestnut streets.

"The opportunity was right," Jamison says. "There was a void in the market for what the other stores offered. There was really no one else around. You always have men's shoe stores, of course, but for what I'm doing, there's nothing else like it. This is a boutique and there's such a focus on shoes. I thought I could offer styles that other retailers aren't willing to offer."

"If you go to a department store or a men's clothing store, shoes become more of an accessory," he continues. "But I'm willing to do more than what other retailers are doing. I travel a lot, throughout the country and the world, to different trade shows. I do a lot of research to offer more options."

Blue Sole has a wide variety of shoe choices—some traditional, others more daring and fresh—but they all have high quality in common. Every customer, from the fashion connoisseur to the everyday guy looking to take his fashion sense in a bolder direction, is sure to find the right fit for his personality.

"One of the biggest mistakes I think men make is they kind of get stuck in a look that they think is conservative, but it's actually more dated than anything else," Jamison says. "It's just old, and they look dated. It's like wearing platform shoes from the '70s. But we have shoes that cause you to stand out in a good way and distinguish yourself from the guy next door or the guy sitting in the same office as you."

While you will certainly find a number of well-known brand names at Blue Sole, there are also plenty of options from other manufacturers. Jamison carefully chooses everything that comes into his store and believes his items re-



flect his own sense of style.

"Here's my buying philosophy: There's not a thing in my store that I offer that I don't personally like," he says. "I don't personally wear everything, but if I don't like it I don't bring it into the store. I bring it because I understand it and I appreciate it. I appreciate the artistry that goes into making the shoes, the techniques and the workmanship."

One of the trends Jamison has noted recently is the move from the basic brown or black shoe to bolder colors, such as different shades of blue or red. He also thinks men in general are putting more thought into their footwear and leaning away from the "sloppy" sneaker look.

"A grown man has no business in a sneaker unless he's going to the gym," Jamison says. "Nowadays, it's more about buying a casual shoe than a sneaker. It's more expressive and it gives you a more sophisticated look."

Blue Sole also carries a full range of accessories, such as belts and cuff links, and its selection of socks have become quite popular as well. "It's the best in the city, hands down," Jamison says. "Socks are a really important aspect. I say this to customers all the time: It's an inexpensive way to express yourself, to explore or expand your sense of style without being overaggressive or taking a whole lot of risks. It's just a little flash of your wardrobe, but it makes a big statement. It doesn't have to be a bright red sock; it can be something with a nice, subtle pattern. But it makes a big difference in how you appear."

Whatever item you're looking for, you can expect to have a pleasant shopping experience

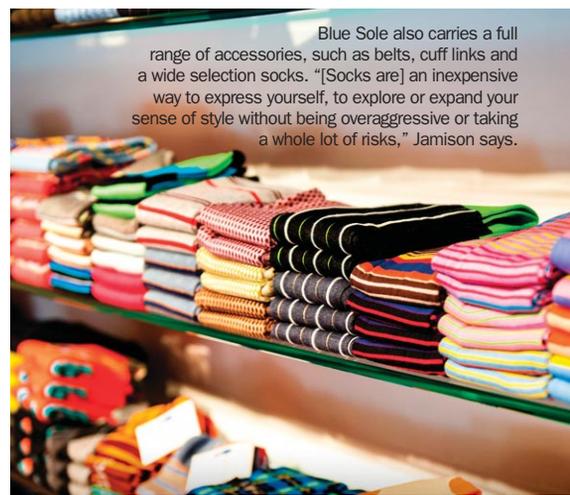
Blue Sole has a wide variety of shoe choices—some traditional, others more daring—but all have one thing in common: exceptional quality.



at Blue Sole. Every customer who walks into the store receives a warm greeting, and Jamison's employees are just as passionate and knowledgeable as he is. They are quick to provide fashion tips or answer any questions a customer has.

"That's the one thing that I stress to my employees—it's really about the service for me," Jamison says. "If I do my job in buying, I think that everything else falls into place as long as the service is there. My employees' performance is not based on how much they sell. It's really based on how they serve the customer."

Blue Sole has become such a success that Jamison hopes to expand to another city in the future. For now, though, he is content to spread his tastes for fine footwear in his hometown. "Nice shoes allow you to express yourself without necessarily being overaggressive or outlandish in your style," he says. "It's for a guy who's looking to tweak his own sense of style, to take it in a new direction or move it forward. That's really what fashion is. It's always changing, always evolving." ■



Blue Sole also carries a full range of accessories, such as belts, cuff links and a wide selection socks. "[Socks are] an inexpensive way to express yourself, to explore or expand your sense of style without being overaggressive or taking a whole lot of risks," Jamison says.

→ **Blue Sole Shoes**  
1805 Chestnut Street  
215-496-9244  
[www.bluesoleshoes.com](http://www.bluesoleshoes.com)