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ALLSTON BRIGHTON

They kick it in Allston like no place else

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(Courtesy Converse.com)

Converse is one of at least four shoe companies with a product called Allston. The Rune Allston skate shoe, pictured above, and Converse's Allston OX are both named after the Allston neighborhood.

By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

Newton has the fig, Cape Cod has its cranberry-vodka mixed drink, Boston has its baked beans, and Allston has – shoes?

At least four major shoe companies, two of which are headquartered in Massachusetts, have shoes named "Allston."

Converse, which was founded in a city about 10 miles north of Boston in 1908, confirmed their Allston skate sneakers were "a nod to the neighborhood."

Vans was unsure as to the origin of the name of one lone, old, out-of-stock skate shoe design among countless styles. A third manufacturer, Reebok, was unable to be reached for comment on its retro-look sneaker and did not respond to mail of both the voice and e-variety.

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Foot apparel brand Via Spiga insisted its high-heeled clogs are named “at random” and that their use of Allston had nothing to do with us.

But what else could an Allston shoe name refer to besides the hip, young neighborhood?

With only five people and two places listed on Wikipedia’s [disambiguation page](#) for the term “Allston,” the only plausible explanations we could find were that either one shoe designer used the name first and others followed, perhaps because it sounded cool, or that the designers were naming their foot gear after the 19th century American painter and poet Washington Allston, the neighborhood’s namesake. (He lived in Cambridge, though.)

It’s also possible the shoe namers had never heard of the neighborhood.

But that level of oversight seems unlikely, so we’d imagine these shoe names have at least indirect ties to the neighborhood, which is said to be the only community in the country named after an artist, according to the 2007 book, “[Allston-Brighton in Transition: From Cattle Town to Streetcar Suburb](#),” by William P. Marchione.

For Converse’s [Rune Allston](#) (the shoe’s name also pulls from skateboarder [Rune Gliberg](#)) and [Allston OX](#) shoes, however, it is a clear, direct link.

“We have named quite a few of the skate shoes after cities, towns, areas and streets in New England,” Jason Thome of Converse said in an e-mail.

The company also has a Malden shoe collection named after the city where it began before moving to North Andover, others named after the Revere and Upton communities, one named Tremont and a Brighton shoe is expected in the spring, according to a local skate shop owner.

“We are proud to be an East coast skate brand and like to keep that distinction apparent among all of the Southern California based brands,” Thome added.

But, even Converse’s SoCal competitors Vans Inc. have Allston-dubbed kicks.

Native to the northern section of California’s Orange Country, though owned by North Carolina-based VF Corporation, Vans no longer sells its several-year-old [Allston shoe](#) directly or through its retail partners, according to VF Corp. spokeswoman Adriana Matthews, and therefore Vans was not able to find out why it was given its name.

“It’s so old that we no longer have the members of the design team that worked on that shoe,” Matthews said in an e-mail.

Reebok, the other Bay State based shoe maker with Allston footwear, could not be reached for comment. But according to [EU Kicks sneaker magazine](#), the shoe was launched in fall 2009 with an '80s-style high-top version and a low-top version.

The only non-sneaker Allston shoes are [clogs made by Via Spiga](#), which has its flagship store situated in the Big Apple and is a brand of Shoes.com owner Brown Shoe Company Inc. out of St. Louis, Mo.

“The names of the Via Spiga shoes are chosen at random, so, no, this shoe was not named after the neighborhood in Boston,” said Brown Shoe Co. spokeswoman Diana Thomas in an e-mail.

However, random names still need to come from somewhere, right? Perhaps the Via Spiga shoe fits into the shoe-named-for-another-shoe category.

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Local advertising by PaperG

A local skateboard and apparel shop sells Vans and Converse shoes, including Converse's Allston, but was currently out of stock of the neighborhood-named sneaker.

For brands like Converse that named their shoe after the neighborhood, Orchard Skate Shop co-owner Armin Bachman said the name makes sense, especially since the company is locally based and their shoes target a younger demographic.

"There are a lot of schools and colleges here and this has kind of always been a youthful neighborhood," he said.

For the companies that either deny, or are unsure of, any association between their shoes and the neighborhood, the reasoning behind the name is not quite as clear, but "[Allston] rolls of the tongue really well," said Bachman, whose shop on Harvard Avenue moved to the neighborhood from its Mission Hill location in May.

However, names rarely make a difference to consumers.

"For the most part, people are just going on how the shoe looks and feels," Bachman said. "But sometimes those subtle things about it having a tie to Boston can be a plus for people around here."

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