



[Subscribe to All Content](#) [Subscribe to Daily Content](#)

## [Writing Shotgun](#)

### DEMOLITION, MAN

[Theo Douglas](#) Wed. October 14

#### **Midcentury modern Roberts Department Store meets the wrecking ball Thursday. Don Draper could not be reached for comment**

Just when you thought talks to replace Bixby Knolls' long-vacant Roberts Department Store with a brand new [Marshalls](#) might have come to a grinding halt ... well, they haven't.

Demolition begins at 10 a.m. Thursday on the Roberts, long owned by the erstwhile Gaska family; and city officials go so far in their press release as to promise that a combination of "skiploaders and bulldozers" will have the 52,000-square foot edifice flattened in one day.

Are they totally stoked about this one?

"I am, I am," said a beaming City Manager Pat West, as Tuesday's Long Beach City Council meeting closed. "For seven, eight, nine, 10 years we've been just waiting. I've been here just over four years and this was one of the first things I heard about when I came here."

And we're for sure getting a Marshalls? Not a Kitson, or a Dries Van Noten outlet, or a Van Cleef & Arpels?

"The Gaskas feel comfortable enough that Marshalls will build, so they've asked that we go ahead with the demolition," West said.

How do the rest of us feel? Depends.

The Roberts building at 4450 Atlantic Ave. may have been vacant longer than most of us can remember (periodic stints as a Halloween costume shop aside) but it's one of the city's last remaining examples of midcentury modern commercial architecture.

In English, that means it's an old-time department store—the type you could see doubling for exteriors on AMC's muchly decorated *Mad Men* TV series, centered around the doings of intricately-plotted, early 1960s ad man Don Draper.

They don't make 'em like this building any more; and as much as some of us might like to pretend we never shopped at a place with the lowly-sounding name of Roberts—or in monolithic stucco structures that seemed to glare at us—the fact remains: we did.

"Don't get me started," said former Cultural Heritage Commissioner E. Thor Carlson, [who lives](#) in a midcentury Bixby Knolls house and is a strong proponent of the architectural style and of saving the ex-department store.

Once, its style was common in Bixby Knolls: much of the area was developed in the 1950s, and buildings like the Roberts kept each other company.

Not Thursday.

So will we see Carlson chaining himself to the glass handles of the building's heavy glass doors—which are part of its ground floor glass wall?

“I thought about it,” he said, “but no. That would just give them an added bonus for tearing it down.”

At least they're not using dynamite. Downtown's venerable Omar Hubbard apartment building was reportedly the last time dynamite was used to level a structure in Long Beach, some time in the 1970s.

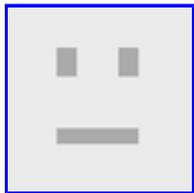
Tags: [bixby knolls](#), [California](#), [City Manager Pat West](#), [E. Thor Carlson](#), [Gaska family](#), [Long Beach](#), [Marshalls](#), [Omar Hubbard apartment building](#), [Roberts department store](#), [Southern California](#), [The District Weekly](#), [Theo Douglas](#)

ShareThis



## Add New Comment

You are commenting as a [Guest](#). You may select one to log into:



- Logged in as
- [Logout from DISQUS](#)

Type your comment here.

Showing 1 of 1 Comment

Sort by  [Community Page](#)  [Subscribe by email](#)



*grannyfly* [5 days ago](#)

Can someone explain why Marshalls could not upgrade the existing building?

- [Like](#)
- [Report](#)
- [Reply](#)