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## **Russian buys world's priciest home**

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16th August, 2008

## THE ARTICLE

A new world record for a home has been set by an unidentified Russian billionaire. The mystery tycoon has spent \$750 million on a luxurious villa on the French Riviera. The price tag smashes the previous record of the Indian steel magnate Lakshmi Mittal earlier this year. He paid \$235 million for a mansion on London's 'Billionaire Boulevard'. The new record was for the historic Villa Leopolda estate on France's Cote d'Azur. For his or her money, the unnamed purchaser gets a mansion built by King Leopold II of Belgium in 1902. The grounds include 20 acres of gardens that require fifty full-time gardeners, and 1,200 olive, lemon and orange trees. Jonathan Hewlett, a London property expert, told the BBC that Central London and the French Riviera are the "current hotpots" for Russia's new mega-rich.

The world's media have been guessing the identity of the new owner of the Villa Leopolda. Many press reports say it is an oil fat cat. Initial rumours were that Roman Abramovich, the owner of Chelsea Football Club, was the mystery buyer. He already owns an exclusive property near Antibes, also on the French Riviera. According to a local French newspaper, there are now over 60 villas or mansions on the Cote d'Azur owned by wealthy Russians. Britain's Times newspaper quoted a French luxury-home salesman as saying Russians become angry if they are offered a property at any price below \$150 million. The latest record, however, will not last long. India's richest man Mukesh Ambani will soon move into his \$2 billion 27-storey home. The property was supposedly inspired by the Hanging Gardens of Babylon.

# WARM-UPS

**1. PROPERTY:** Walk around the class and talk to other students about property. Change partners often. After you finish, sit with your partner(s) and share your findings.

**2. CHAT:** In pairs / groups, decide which of these topics or words from the article are most interesting and which are most boring.

*world records / billionaires / mystery / price tags / mansions / gardens / hotspots / media / rumours / exclusive property / becoming angry / Hanging Gardens of Babylon*

Have a chat about the topics you liked. Change topics and partners frequently.

**3. BILLIONAIRE:** Would you like to be a billionaire? Write what you would do if you were a billionaire in the table below. Change partners and share your ideas.

Situations	What I would do
My house	
My car	
My family & friends	
Charity	
Hobbies	
Other _____	

**4. WEALTH:** Students A strongly believe it is immoral for a few people to be so rich while millions starve; Students B strongly believe wealth makes the world a better place. Change partners again and talk about your roles and conversations.

**5. MY WANTS:** What do you want most in life? Rank the following in order of your most desired.

- |                             |                                |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| _____ a billion dollars     | _____ extra-supermodel looks   |
| _____ perfect health        | _____ the perfect family       |
| _____ a genius intelligence | _____ the world's best friends |
| _____ fluency in English    | _____ a super-long life        |

**6. HOME:** Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with the word 'home'. Share your words with your partner(s) and talk about them. Together, put the words into different categories.

# BEFORE READING / LISTENING

**1. TRUE / FALSE:** Look at the article's headline and guess whether these sentences are true (T) or false (F):

- a. A Russian billionaire has bought an expensive mystery home. T / F
- b. The price more than tripled the previous world record paid for a home. T / F
- c. The record home is in a London street called 'Billionaire Boulevard'. T / F
- d. Russia's wealthiest people are buying property in London and France. T / F
- e. The owner of the world record home has many fat cats. T / F
- f. The mystery buyer also owns an English football club. T / F
- g. Wealthy Russians prefer properties with a price tag over \$150 million. T / F
- h. An Indian tycoon has built a replica of the Hanging Gardens of Babylon. T / F

**2. SYNONYM MATCH:** Match the following synonyms from the article:

- |                 |                   |
|-----------------|-------------------|
| 1. set          | a. recommended    |
| 2. tycoon       | b. super          |
| 3. purchaser    | c. created        |
| 4. require      | d. early          |
| 5. mega         | e. buyer          |
| 6. guessing     | f. as stated by   |
| 7. initial      | g. influenced     |
| 8. according to | h. billionaire    |
| 9. offered      | i. speculating on |
| 10. inspired    | j. need           |

**3. PHRASE MATCH:** Match the following phrases from the article (sometimes more than one combination is possible):

- |                                  |                               |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. A new world record for a home | a. Villa Leopolda estate      |
| 2. The price tag smashes         | b. exclusive property         |
| 3. the historic                  | c. has been set               |
| 4. The grounds include 20        | d. of the new owner           |
| 5. current                       | e. Hanging Gardens of Babylon |
| 6. guessing the identity         | f. the previous record        |
| 7. Initial                       | g. acres of gardens           |
| 8. He already owns an            | h. salesman                   |
| 9. a French luxury-home          | i. hotpots                    |
| 10. supposedly inspired by the   | j. rumours                    |

# WHILE READING / LISTENING

**GAP FILL:** Put the words into the gaps in the text.

A new world record for a home has been \_\_\_\_\_ by an unidentified Russian billionaire. The mystery tycoon has \_\_\_\_\_ \$750 million on a luxurious villa on the French Riviera. The price tag \_\_\_\_\_ the previous record of the Indian steel magnate Lakshmi Mittal earlier this year. He paid \$235 million for a mansion on London's 'Billionaire Boulevard'. The new record was for the \_\_\_\_\_ Villa Leopolda estate on France's Cote d'Azur. For his or her money, the unnamed purchaser \_\_\_\_\_ a mansion built by King Leopold II of Belgium in 1902. The grounds include 20 acres of gardens that \_\_\_\_\_ fifty full-time gardeners, and 1,200 olive, lemon and orange trees. Jonathan Hewlett, a London \_\_\_\_\_ expert, told the BBC that Central London and the French Riviera are the "current \_\_\_\_\_" for Russia's new mega-rich.

*require*  
*historic*  
*spent*  
*property*  
*gets*  
*set*  
*hotpots*  
*smashes*

The world's media have been guessing the \_\_\_\_\_ of the new owner of the Villa Leopolda. Many press reports say it is an oil fat \_\_\_\_\_. Initial rumours were that Roman Abramovich, the owner of Chelsea Football Club, was the \_\_\_\_\_ buyer. He already owns an \_\_\_\_\_ property near Antibes, also on the French Riviera. According to a local French newspaper, there are now over 60 villas or mansions on the Cote d'Azur \_\_\_\_\_ by wealthy Russians. Britain's Times newspaper quoted a French luxury-home salesman as saying Russians become angry if they are \_\_\_\_\_ a property at any price below \$150 million. The latest record, however, will not \_\_\_\_\_ long. India's richest man Mukesh Ambani will soon move into his \$2 billion 27-storey home. The property was supposedly \_\_\_\_\_ by the Hanging Gardens of Babylon.

*last*  
*mystery*  
*cat*  
*owned*  
*inspired*  
*identity*  
*exclusive*  
*offered*

## **LISTENING:** Listen and fill in the spaces.

A new world record for a home \_\_\_\_\_ an unidentified Russian billionaire. The mystery tycoon has spent \$750 million on a luxurious villa on the French Riviera. The \_\_\_\_\_ the previous record of the Indian steel magnate Lakshmi Mittal earlier this year. He paid \$235 million for a mansion on London's 'Billionaire Boulevard'. The \_\_\_\_\_ the historic Villa Leopolda estate on France's Cote d'Azur. \_\_\_\_\_ money, the unnamed purchaser gets a mansion built by King Leopold II of Belgium in 1902. The \_\_\_\_\_ acres of gardens that require fifty full-time gardeners, and 1,200 olive, lemon and orange trees. Jonathan Hewlett, a London property expert, told the BBC that Central London and the French Riviera are the "current hotpots" for Russia's \_\_\_\_\_.

The world's media have been guessing \_\_\_\_\_ the new owner of the Villa Leopolda. Many press reports say it \_\_\_\_\_. Initial rumours were that Roman Abramovich, the owner of Chelsea Football Club, was the mystery buyer. He \_\_\_\_\_ exclusive property near Antibes, also on the French Riviera. \_\_\_\_\_ local French newspaper, there are now over 60 villas or mansions on the Cote d'Azur \_\_\_\_\_ Russians. Britain's Times newspaper quoted a French luxury-home salesman as saying Russians become angry if they are offered a property at \_\_\_\_\_ \$150 million. The latest record, however, will not last long. India's richest man Mukesh Ambani will soon move into his \$2 billion 27-storey home. The property was supposedly \_\_\_\_\_ Hanging Gardens of Babylon.

## AFTER READING / LISTENING

**1. WORD SEARCH:** Look in your dictionaries / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms ... for the words **'fat'** and **'cat'**.

<b>fat</b>	<b>cat</b>
------------	------------

- Share your findings with your partners.
- Make questions using the words you found.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

**2. ARTICLE QUESTIONS:** Look back at the article and write down some questions you would like to ask the class about the text.

- Share your questions with other classmates / groups.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

**3. GAP FILL:** In pairs / groups, compare your answers to this exercise. Check your answers. Talk about the words from the activity. Were they new, interesting, worth learning...?

**4. VOCABULARY:** Circle any words you do not understand. In groups, pool unknown words and use dictionaries to find their meanings.

**5. TEST EACH OTHER:** Look at the words below. With your partner, try to recall how they were used in the text:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• new</li><li>• tag</li><li>• historic</li><li>• 1902</li><li>• 20</li><li>• mega</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• media</li><li>• cat</li><li>• exclusive</li><li>• 60</li><li>• 150</li><li>• 27</li></ul>
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# STUDENT BILLIONAIRE SURVEY

Write five GOOD questions about billionaires in the table. Do this in pairs. Each student must write the questions on his / her own paper.

When you have finished, interview other students. Write down their answers.

	STUDENT 1 _____	STUDENT 2 _____	STUDENT 3 _____
Q.1.			
Q.2.			
Q.3.			
Q.4.			
Q.5.			

- Now return to your original partner and share and talk about what you found out. Change partners often.
- Make mini-presentations to other groups on your findings.



## PROPERTY DISCUSSION

STUDENT A's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student B)

- a) What did you think when you read the headline?
- b) What springs to mind when you hear the word 'billionaire'?
- c) Would you like to be a billionaire?
- d) How would your life change if you were mega rich?
- e) Why do you think the buyer's identity is being kept a secret?
- f) Would you spend \$750 million on a home or buy a cheaper house and give the rest to charity?
- g) Do you think people who spend so much money on themselves are immoral?
- h) Where would you live if you had lots of money?
- i) Would you like a house that has 20 acres of gardens?
- j) Where are the property hotspots in your country?

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## PROPERTY DISCUSSION

STUDENT B's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student A)

- a) Did you like reading this article?
- b) Are you interested in knowing the identity of the mystery buyer?
- c) What do you think of Russia's oil fat cats?
- d) Would you invest in property?
- e) Why do you think someone might get angry at being offered a home less than \$150 million?
- f) Is it important for you to own your own home?
- g) Why do you think someone would build a 27-storey home?
- h) What inspirations would you use in designing your own home?
- i) What do you know about the Hanging Gardens of Babylon?
- j) What questions would you like to ask the mystery tycoon?

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# LANGUAGE

A new world record for a home has been (1) \_\_\_\_\_ by an unidentified Russian billionaire. The mystery tycoon has spent \$750 million on a luxurious villa (2) \_\_\_\_\_ the French Riviera. The (3) \_\_\_\_\_ tag smashes the previous record of the Indian steel magnate Lakshmi Mittal earlier this year. He paid \$235 million for a mansion on London's 'Billionaire Boulevard'. The new record was for the historic Villa Leopolda estate on France's Cote d'Azur. For his or her money, the (4) \_\_\_\_\_ purchaser gets a mansion built by King Leopold II of Belgium in 1902. The grounds include 20 acres of gardens that (5) \_\_\_\_\_ fifty full-time gardeners, and 1,200 olive, lemon and orange trees. Jonathan Hewlett, a London property expert, told the BBC that Central London and the French Riviera are the "current (6) \_\_\_\_\_" for Russia's new mega-rich.

The world's media have been (7) \_\_\_\_\_ the identity of the new owner of the Villa Leopolda. Many press reports say it is an oil fat (8) \_\_\_\_\_. Initial rumours were that Roman Abramovich, the owner of Chelsea Football Club, was the mystery buyer. He already owns an (9) \_\_\_\_\_ property near Antibes, also on the French Riviera. According to a local French newspaper, there are now over 60 villas or mansions on the Cote d'Azur owned (10) \_\_\_\_\_ wealthy Russians. Britain's Times newspaper (11) \_\_\_\_\_ a French luxury-home salesman as saying Russians become angry if they are offered a property at any price below \$150 million. The latest record, however, will not last long. India's richest man Mukesh Ambani will soon move into his \$2 billion 27-storey home. The property was supposedly (12) \_\_\_\_\_ by the Hanging Gardens of Babylon.

**Put the correct words from the table below in the above article.**

- |     |               |                 |                 |                   |
|-----|---------------|-----------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| 1.  | (a) set up    | (b) setting     | (c) sets        | (d) set           |
| 2.  | (a) in        | (b) on          | (c) at          | (d) over          |
| 3.  | (a) price     | (b) cost        | (c) fee         | (d) amount        |
| 4.  | (a) unmarked  | (b) unmanned    | (c) unnamed     | (d) unmapped      |
| 5.  | (a) request   | (b) requires    | (c) require     | (d) requests      |
| 6.  | (a) hotshot   | (b) hotspots    | (c) hotshots    | (d) hotspot       |
| 7.  | (a) guessing  | (b) guess       | (c) guessed     | (d) guesses       |
| 8.  | (a) kitty     | (b) feline      | (c) kitten      | (d) cat           |
| 9.  | (a) exclusion | (b) exclusive   | (c) exclusively | (d) exclusiveness |
| 10. | (a) at        | (b) of          | (c) with        | (d) by            |
| 11. | (a) quotes    | (b) quotation   | (c) quoted      | (d) quote         |
| 12. | (a) inspired  | (b) inspiration | (c) inspiring   | (d) inspire       |



# HOMework

**1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION:** Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.

**2. INTERNET:** Search the Internet and find out more about the historic Villa Leopolda estate. Share what you discover with your partner(s) in the next lesson.

**3. BILLIONAIRES:** Make a poster about the world's billionaires. How did they get their wealth? What do they do with their riches? Show your work to your classmates in the next lesson. Did you all have similar things?

**4. BILLIONAIRE:** Write a magazine article about wealth and a lack of it. Include imaginary interviews with a billionaire and someone who lives on less than a dollar a day. What do they think of each other?

Read what you wrote to your classmates in the next lesson. Write down any new words and expressions you hear from your partner(s).

**5. LETTER:** Write a letter to the unidentified Russian billionaire. Ask him/her three questions about being wealthy. Make three suggestions on what he/she should do with his/her fortune. Read your letter to your partner(s) in your next lesson. Your partner(s) will answer your questions.

**6. DIARY / JOURNAL:** You are a billionaire. Write about one day in your life. Read your entry to your classmates in the next lesson.

# ANSWERS

## TRUE / FALSE:

- a. F      b. T      c. F      d. T      e. F      f. F      g. T      h. F

## SYNONYM MATCH:

- |                 |                   |
|-----------------|-------------------|
| 1. set          | a. created        |
| 2. tycoon       | b. billionaire    |
| 3. purchaser    | c. buyer          |
| 4. require      | d. need           |
| 5. mega         | e. super          |
| 6. guessing     | f. speculating on |
| 7. initial      | g. early          |
| 8. according to | h. as stated by   |
| 9. offered      | i. recommended    |
| 10. inspired    | j. influenced     |

## PHRASE MATCH:

- |                                  |                               |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. A new world record for a home | a. has been set               |
| 2. The price tag smashes         | b. the previous record        |
| 3. the historic                  | c. Villa Leopolda estate      |
| 4. The grounds include 20        | d. acres of gardens           |
| 5. current                       | e. hotpots                    |
| 6. guessing the identity         | f. of the new owner           |
| 7. Initial                       | g. rumours                    |
| 8. He already owns an            | h. exclusive property         |
| 9. a French luxury-home          | i. salesman                   |
| 10. supposedly inspired by the   | j. Hanging Gardens of Babylon |

## GAP FILL:

### Russian buys world's priciest home

A new world record for a home has been **set** by an unidentified Russian billionaire. The mystery tycoon has **spent** \$750 million on a luxurious villa on the French Riviera. The price tag **smashes** the previous record of the Indian steel magnate Lakshmi Mittal earlier this year. He paid \$235 million for a mansion on London's 'Billionaire Boulevard'. The new record was for the **historic** Villa Leopolda estate on France's Cote d'Azur. For his or her money, the unnamed purchaser **gets** a mansion built by King Leopold II of Belgium in 1902. The grounds include 20 acres of gardens that **require** fifty full-time gardeners, and 1,200 olive, lemon and orange trees. Jonathan Hewlett, a London **property** expert, told the BBC that Central London and the French Riviera are the "current **hotpots**" for Russia's new mega-rich.

The world's media have been guessing the **identity** of the new owner of the Villa Leopolda. Many press reports say it is an oil fat **cat**. Initial rumours were that Roman Abramovich, the owner of Chelsea Football Club, was the **mystery** buyer. He already owns an **exclusive** property near Antibes, also on the French Riviera. According to a local French newspaper, there are now over 60 villas or mansions on the Cote d'Azur **owned** by wealthy Russians. Britain's Times newspaper quoted a French luxury-home salesman as saying Russians become angry if they are **offered** a property at any price below \$150 million. The latest record, however, will not **last** long. India's richest man Mukesh Ambani will soon move into his \$2 billion 27-storey home. The property was supposedly **inspired** by the Hanging Gardens of Babylon.

## LANGUAGE WORK

- 1 - d    2 - b    3 - a    4 - c    5 - c    6 - b    7 - a    8 - d    9 - b    10 - d    11 - c    12 - a