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What Exactly Do You Mean?

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Именно: exactly (sometimes)

Именно (exactly) is a word I love and hate. I love hearing it and reading it, and I really love to say it. It's a very satisfying word to spit out: Hit that first
И hard and long, then pop off it
with two quick syllables and a frown. Try it:
Именно!

But when it comes to translating именно, I start by muttering dire imprecations and end with throwing texts across the room and then running over to stomp on them.

That is to say:
именно is one tricky little word.

As usual, let's start with the easy bits.
Именно can be used to mean "exactly": Часто не
понимаешь, что хочешь поехать именно туда (Sometimes you just don't know that it's

exactly where you want to go.) Я не знала, что именно хотела у него спросить (I didn't know exactly what I wanted to ask him.)

Sometimes the easiest thing is to leave it out of a translation or compensate:
Он запрётся
в ванной с
гитарой и начнёт сочинять. Почему именно в ванной? ("He'll lock himself in the bathroom with his guitar and begin to write music." "In the bathroom? Why the heck there?")

Именно can also be used to clarify something in a question: —Бери пальто! —Какое именно? ("Grab a coat!" "Which one?") Or to set up a clarification:
Основная масса
картофеля производится в
средней полосе, а именно в Брянской, Тульской, и
Нижегородской областях (Most potatoes are grown in the central part of the country, specifically Bryansk, Tula and Novgorod regions.)

As a response to a statement, Именно! or Вот именно! expresses hearty agreement: Yup, you got it. That's it in a nutshell.
That's it exactly. You took the words right out of my mouth.
—Мы закончили бы отчёт вовремя и без проблем если бы начальство поручало сделать это месяц назад а не во вторник.
—Вот
именно. ("We would have finished the report on time and easily if management had told us to do it a month ago instead of Tuesday." "No kidding.")

There can be a slightly snarky tone to it: —
Тебе с ним жить. —Вот именно. ("You're the
one who's going to live with him." "Nice of you to remember that.")

That's all the fun part of
именно. The
tricky part is in phrases like this: Именно от
витамина А зависит производство коллагена.
This is something like: It's Vitamin A
that is key to the production of collagen.
The problem is not that you can't say that in
English. The problem is that this kind of sentence construction with
именно is very
common in Russian and much less frequent in English. So the English is marked in a way that the Russian isn't.

And that's why I spend hours growling as I try to say the same thing in a different way.
Именно Россия является стратегически важным рынком для нашей фирмы благодаря её динамичному развитию.
Not: It is specifically Russia that is a strategically
important market for our company due its dynamic development. But maybe: Russia's

dynamic development makes it the key strategic market for our company.

And sometimes I go rogue and — don't tell anyone — I just ignore the word altogether: Вот только как именно это сделать, я не знаю (There's just one little problem: I have no idea how to do it).

Именно так (That's the way to do it.)

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