Portfolio Review

**Global stocks declined.** Equities fell during the quarter, trimming year-to-date gains amid uneven economic growth. Stronger-than-expected growth in the U.S. raised expectations that the Federal Reserve (Fed) would maintain restrictive monetary policies. The Fed raised its benchmark interest rate from a 22-year high of 5.25% to 5.5% in July. Despite pausing in September, the Fed said more increases remain possible.

**Inflation persists.** After trending lower for a year, headline inflation spiked for two straight months, reaching 3.7% in August. Despite high inflation and borrowing costs, retail sales continued to advance in July and August. Among large-cap stocks, growth fared slightly better than value; among small caps, growth underperformed. Large caps outperformed small caps and mid caps for the second-consecutive quarter.

**Energy lagged.** Stocks in this sector broadly outperformed the benchmark, and our underweight positioning relative to the benchmark, coupled with poor security selection in the oil, gas and consumable fuels industry, led to underperformance compared with the benchmark. A larger exposure to rate-of-return-oriented securities lagged because the market favored higher beta energy companies.

**Information technology lagged.** Most of the underperformance compared with the benchmark came from unfavorable stock selection, especially a position in Coherent. This maker of engineered materials, optical communications and industrial technology systems faces headwinds in its end markets, which are cyclical.

**Health care contributed.** Our underweight relative to the benchmark added to performance because the sector lagged the benchmark. The biotechnology and pharmaceuticals industries make up a large portion of the benchmark, and these businesses often don’t produce earnings, may even be pre-revenue and tend to be speculative. So, they are typically screened out by our process.

Key Contributors

**ChampionX.** As an oil field services business focused on production chemicals and equipment, this company continues to demonstrate solid execution and results. The stock has also benefited from stronger energy prices.

**H&R Block.** Earlier in the year, after concerns about a new, free IRS tax-filing service depressed the share price, we reinitiated a position in this firm. The stock outperformed in the quarter, aided by an attractive dividend and a strong 2023 tax season, which funded more share buybacks.

**Axis Capital Holdings.** This provider of specialty insurance and reinsurance has focused more on high-value specialty products and less on reinsurance offerings. This, along with strong underwriting, solid premium growth and better cost controls, boosted earnings growth, leading to a higher valuation multiple.

Key Detractors

**Coherent.** This maker of engineered materials, optical communications and industrial systems enjoys strong positions in markets with secular growth such as artificial intelligence, cloud computing and electric vehicles. But near-term weakness is expected.
**Tapestry.** Shares of this luxury goods company lagged due to concerns over discretionary spending, particularly in North America and China. The acquisition of Capri Holdings also weighed on shares.

**Tecnoglass.** Shares of this leading maker of architectural glass and aluminum for commercial and residential markets underperformed compared with the benchmark. Growth slowed from extremely high levels, and investors became concerned about the housing market. We added weight to the position because the stock is cheap.

**Notable Trades**

**Avient.** Avient is a producer and formulator of specialty chemicals and materials primarily focused on polymer-related chemistry. We have owned this business in the past, following the sale of the distribution business. We believe the stock price does not reflect the quality of the current product portfolio.

**Red Rock Resorts.** This casino operator targets the Las Vegas local market, which is growing rapidly due to migration from California. Market dynamics are also favorable, consisting of a virtual duopoly. Also, Red Rocks has opened a new casino, which should perform well, given a history of successful new openings.

**Coherent (conv).** We owned a Coherent convertible that was converted into common shares upon maturity of the convertible during the quarter.

**Chase.** We exited this specialty chemical company following the announcement it was being acquired by KKR, a private equity firm.

**Positioning for the Future**

The portfolio seeks to invest in small-cap, higher-quality, dividend-paying companies selling at a discount to fair value. Our process is based on individual security selection, but broad themes have emerged.

**A large overweight relative to the benchmark in financials.** Our overweight is distributed across a number of industries in the sector. We continue to maintain a significant overweight in banks, insurance and financial services, while avoiding mortgage real estate investment trusts (REITs) and consumer finance. A portion of the overweight in financials is driven by a number of noncommon holdings (preferred stocks), which are designed to help enhance the rate of return of the portfolio while reducing portfolio volatility.

**Opportunities in communication services.** Currently, our exposure lies in the media (television and radio/digital marketing), cable and content spaces in companies that are notable for their strong free cash flows and balance sheet strength.

**Little exposure to health care.** Valuations in this sector are not presenting attractive risk/reward opportunities. Also, a large portion of our underweight relative to the benchmark is driven by our lack of exposure to the biotechnology, pharmaceuticals and life sciences tools and services industries. As a group, they offer few of the characteristics (strong cash flow, high returns, attractive valuations) we require when investing our clients’ capital. We will likely remain materially underweight in health care because these industries, which now account for approximately 5.4% of the benchmark, do not fit our process regarding quality and strength.

**Few opportunities in real estate.** Valuations for higher-quality REITs remain rich relative to other opportunities in the small-cap value space, leaving us with a limited set of attractive risk/reward opportunities. Like the utilities space, REITs are often viewed as bond proxies, and the recent surge in risk-free rates has provided investors seeking returns with more attractive alternatives.

**Narrow exposure in energy.** While we hold an underweight position in energy relative to the benchmark, our positioning is unique, given significant exposure to nontraditional energy sector names. Our exposure here is tilted toward higher-returning pipeline operators (Hess Midstream Operations) and higher-returning energy master limited partnerships (TXO Partners) as well as consumables-driven oil field services providers (ChampionX).
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Portfolio holdings are as of the date indicated, and subject to change without notice. Data provided by American Century Investments and FactSet, unless otherwise noted. Material presented has been derived from industry sources considered to be reliable, but their accuracy and completeness cannot be guaranteed.

Historically, small- and/or mid-cap stocks have been more volatile than the stocks of larger, more established companies.

Russell 2000® Value Index: Measures the performance of those Russell 2000 Index companies (the 2,000 smallest of the 3,000 largest publicly traded U.S. companies, based on total market capitalization) with lower price-to-book ratios and lower forecasted growth values.

Investment return and principal value of security investments will fluctuate. The value at the time of redemption may be more or less than the original cost. Past performance is no guarantee of future results.
Adjustable-Rate Mortgages (ARMs): Mortgages in which the interest rate is adjusted periodically according to a specific index.


Agency MBS: Mortgage-backed securities issued by U.S. government agencies.

Alternative Minimum Tax (AMT): A parallel tax system that was created to keep high income individuals from avoiding taxes through various deductions and exemptions.

Asset-Backed Securities (ABS): A form of securitized debt backed by loan assets such as auto loans, student loans, and credit card debt.

Basis Points (BPS): Used to express percentage values that are carried out to two decimal places. One basis point equals 0.01%.

Breakeven Rate: Yield difference between nominal Treasury notes and TIPS; indicates the market’s expectations for inflation.

Carry-Oriented Currencies: Higher-yielding currencies of countries where interest rates are generally higher than those of countries with lower-yielding currencies. These higher-yielding currencies are targeted for "carry trades," where investors borrow money in a low-interest rate currency and invest in a higher yielding currency, potentially profiting from the difference in interest rates.

Collateralized Loan Obligations (CLOs): A form of securitized debt, typically backed by pools of corporate loans and their payments.

Collateralized Mortgage Obligations (CMOs): A form of structured, securitized debt derived from mortgage-backed securities, typically backed by pools of residential mortgages and their payments.

Commercial Mortgage-Backed Securities (CMBS): Securities representing ownership in pools of commercial real estate loans used to finance the construction and improvement of income-producing properties such as hotels, shopping centers, and office buildings.

Commercial Paper: Short-term debt issued by corporations to raise cash and to cover current expenses in anticipation of future revenues.

Commodity: Basic raw materials such as precious metals and natural resources.

Consumer Price Index (CPI): Published by the U.S. government, CPI is the most commonly used statistic to measure inflation in the U.S. economy.

Contribution to Duration (CTD): A measure of bond portfolio risk that reflects a bond sector’s contribution to the overall duration of the portfolio.

Corporate Debt: Debt instruments issued by private corporations.

Covered Bonds: Debt securities backed by cash flows from pools of mortgages or public sector loans. They are a "covered" bond if the originating financial institution becomes insolvent.

Coupon Interest Rate: The interest rate that is assigned to an interest-paying fixed income security when it is issued.

Credit Analysis: An analysis of the financial strength of the issuer of a security, and the ability of that issuer to provide timely payment of interest and principal.

Credit Default Swap: Credit derivative contracts between two counterparties that can be used to hedge credit risk or speculate on the changes in the credit quality of a corporation or government entity.

Credit Quality: Measures (usually in terms of high or low) the ability of issuers of debt securities to make timely interest and principal payments.

Credit Risk: The risk that the inability of the issuers of debt securities to make payments will cause these securities to decline in value.

Currency Overlay: A financial trading strategy used to separate the management of currency risk from other portfolio strategies. A currency overlay manager can seek to hedge the risk from adverse movements in exchange rates, and/or attempt to profit from tactical currency views.

Debt Service: The amount of money required within a given period to keep current on required/scheduled repayments of outstanding debt, including interest and principal.

Deflation: A decline in prices for goods, assets and services.

Derivatives: Securities whose performance and/or structure is derived from the performance and/or structure of other assets, interest rates or indexes.

Duration: A measure of the price sensitivity of a fixed income investment to changes in interest rates. The longer the duration, expressed in years, the more a fixed income investment’s price will change when interest rates change.

Emerging Markets (EM) Debt: Debt issued by countries whose economies are considered to be developing or emerging from underdevelopment.

Excess Return: The return of an investment portfolio minus the return of what is considered to be a relatively risk-free asset, such as a U.S. Treasury bill.

Exchange-Traded Fund (ETF): Represents a group of securities but is traded on an exchange like an individual stock.

Federal Funds Rate: An overnight interest rate banks charge each other for loans.

Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC): The committee that sets interest rate and credit policies for the Federal Reserve System, the U.S. central bank.

Federal Reserve (Fed): The U.S. central bank, responsible for monetary policies affecting the U.S. financial system and the economy.

Fundamental Factors: Economic or financial data used in determining asset value.

Futures Contracts (Futures): Agreements to buy or sell a specific amount of a commodity or financial instrument at a particular price on a stipulated future date.

General Obligation (GO) Bonds: Municipal bonds that are secured by the full faith and credit of the issuer, including its taxing power.

Gross Domestic Product (GDP): A measure of the total economic output in goods and services for an economy.

Government-Sponsored Enterprises (GSEs): Privately owned corporations created by Congress to provide funding and help to reduce the cost of capital for certain borrowing sectors of the economy such as homeowners, students and farmers.

Headline Risk: Refers to the risk that a negative news media headline about one security issuer, incident or sector could affect the demand for and pricing of a much wider swath of securities.

Hedge: An investment designed to reduce the risk of an adverse price move in another investment. Often a hedge consists of taking an offsetting position in a related investment, such as a futures contract.

High-Yield (HY) Debt: Fixed income securities with lower credit quality and lower credit ratings. High-yield securities are rated below BBB.

Hybrid Adjustable-Rate Mortgages (ARMs): Combine the characteristics of fixed-rate and adjustable-rate mortgages, with rates remaining fixed for a set period of time and then adjusting periodically according to a specific index.

Inflation: An economic condition of rising prices for goods, services and assets, or equivalently, a declining value of money. Core inflation excludes food and energy prices, which tend to be volatile. It is the opposite of Deflation.
Inflation-Indexed Securities: Debt securities that offer returns adjusted for inflation. Typically, the principal of inflation-indexed securities is indexed to a widely used inflation measure and adjusted accordingly. Interest payments can be adjusted as well.

Interest Rate Risk: The risk that a fixed income investment’s value will change due to changes in interest rates.

Investment-Grade (IG) Debt: Fixed income securities with relatively high credit quality and credit ratings in the upper ranges of those provided by credit rating services. Using Standard & Poor’s ratings as the benchmark, investment-grade securities are those rated BBB- or higher.

Leverage: The use of financial instruments and/or borrowed capital to increase potential returns or to increase purchasing power.

Long Position: Typical ownership of an asset or investment that gives the owner the right to transfer ownership, the right to any income generated by the asset, and the right to any profits or losses due to value changes.

Long/Short Position: A “market neutral” investing strategy that involves taking long positions in assets that are expected to increase in value and short positions in assets that are expected to decrease in value.

Master Limited Partnerships (MLPs): Publicly traded, generally higher-yielding securities of enterprises that engage in certain businesses, usually pertaining to the use of natural resources.

MSCI ACWI (All Country World Index): A free float-adjusted market capitalization-weighted index that is designed to measure the equity market performance of developed and emerging markets.

Municipal Securities: Debt securities typically issued by or on behalf of U.S. state and local governments, their agencies or authorities to raise money for a variety of public purposes, including financing for state and local governments as well as financing for specific projects and public facilities.

Nominal Yield: The interest rate to par value that the bond issuer promises to pay bond purchasers.

Non-Agency Mortgage-Backed Securities (MBS): MBS are groups of home mortgages that are sold by the issuing banks and then packaged together into “pools” and sold as a single security. Non-agency MBS are issued by private entities, such as financial institutions.

Mortgage-Backed Securities (MBS): A form of securitized debt that represents ownership in pools of mortgage loans and their payments.

Personal Consumption Expenditures (PCE): This price deflator which comes from the Bureau of Economic Analysis’ quarterly report on U.S. gross domestic product is based on a survey of businesses and is intended to capture the price changes in all final goods, no matter the purchaser. Because of its broader scope and certain differences in the methodology used to calculate the PCE price index, the Federal Reserve holds the PCE deflator as its preferred, consistent measure of inflation over time.

Quantitative Easing (QE): A form of monetary policy used by central banks to stimulate economic growth by purchasing domestic government securities to increase the domestic money supply, lower interest rates and encourage investors to make investments in riskier assets such as stocks and high-yield securities.

Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs): Securities that trade like stocks and invest in real estate through properties or mortgages.

Real Yield: A yield that has been adjusted to remove the effects of inflation.

Revenue Bonds: Municipal bonds that are secured by the net revenues from the project or facility being financed.

S&P 500 Index: The S&P 500® Index is composed of 500 selected common stocks most of which are listed on the New York Stock Exchange. It is not an investment product available for purchase.

Secondary Market: A market where investors make purchases from other investors, rather than from the initial issuers.

Securitized Debt: Debt resulting from aggregating debt instruments into a pool of similar debts, then issuing new securities backed by the pool. ABS, MBS, and CMOs are common forms of securitized debt.

Short Position: Refers to the sale of an asset borrowed, not owned, by the seller in anticipation of a price decline. If the seller can buy the asset later (to return what was borrowed) at a lower price, a profit results. If the price rises, the borrower/seller suffers a loss.

Sovereign Debt: A country’s government-issued debt, priced in its native currency, which can be sold to investors in other countries.

Spreads, Maturity Spreads, Credit Spreads: Measured differences between two interest rates or yields that are being compared with each other. Spreads typically are measured between fixed income securities of the same credit quality, but different maturities (maturity spreads), or of the same maturity, but different credit quality (credit spreads).

Spread Sectors: Non-Treasury debt sectors with securities that usually trade at higher yields than comparable-maturity U.S. Treasury securities. These sectors typically trade at higher yields than Treasuries because they usually have relatively higher credit risk and/or more risk of prepayment.

Spread Widening, Tightening: Changes in spreads that reflect changes in relative value, with spread widening usually indicating relative price depreciation and spread tightening indicating relative price appreciation.

Swaps: Two-party contracts entered into primarily by institutional investors for periods ranging from a few weeks to more than one year. In a standard “swap” transaction, two parties agree to exchange the returns (or differentials in rates of return) earned or realized on particular predetermined investments or instruments.

Treasury Inflation-Protected Securities (TIPS): Inflation-linked debt securities issued by the U.S. Treasury.

Technical Factors: Market price behavior, trends, volume, and momentum data used in determining asset value.

Variable-Rate Demand Notes (VRDNs): Short-term debt securities that track market interest rates using periodic (daily, weekly, monthly, or quarterly) interest rate adjustments.

Weighted Average Life to Maturity: The average time in years to receive the principal repayments.

Yield: A rate of return for bonds and other fixed-income securities. There are several types of yields and yield calculations.

Yield Curve: A line graph showing the yields of fixed income securities from a single sector from a range of different maturities at a single point in time.

Yield to Maturity: A common performance calculation for fixed income securities, which takes into account total annual interest payments, the purchase price, the redemption value, and the amount of time remaining until maturity.

Real Yield to Maturity: Yield to maturity minus any “inflation premium” that had been added/priced in.

Zero-Coupon Securities: Debt securities that are sold at a deep discount then redeemed for their full face value at maturity.