

# LARGE CAP DIVERSIFIED VALUE

## MARKET COMMENTARY

The S&P 500 Index returned +11.7% in the fourth quarter bringing its calendar year 2023 return to +26.3%. This represents a full recovery from its decline in the prior calendar year. The index's two-year return is a modest +3.4%, or +1.7% annualized. Most attribute 2022's selloff to rampant inflation and the accompanying increase in interest rates. The Federal Open Market Committee raised its Fed Funds rate 11 consecutive times throughout 2022 and 2023 to combat inflation, before pausing at its most recent meetings. The recovery in 2023 appears largely attributable to signs that the rate hikes were successful in quelling inflation. The most recent CPI release indicated a 3.1% increase year-over-year, representing considerable disinflation from the mid-2022 peak of 9.1%.

The stark return divergence between value stocks and growth stocks continued in 2023, though in opposite direction to 2022. In 2022, large value declined -7.5% compared to large growth at -29.1%. In 2023, large value returned +11.5% compared to large growth at +42.7%. Putting the two years together, large value returned an uneventful +1.5% annualized compared to +0.6% for large growth, though value's return pattern had a significantly lower amplitude. The Russell 1000 Value's discount to its growth counterpart moved from slightly wider than its 45-year average to nearly 2 standard deviations wider than average over the course of 2023. Much of this was driven by what has become known as the "Magnificent 7", which returned between +49% (Apple) and +239% (Nvidia) in the year<sup>1</sup>. The S&P 500's return excluding these stocks would have been a more ordinary +10%. The 7 stocks now comprise 28% of the S&P 500, far surpassing the index's concentration level at the peak of the dot.com bubble in the late 1990s, when the top 7 stocks comprised 21% of the index. The trailing P/E ratio of this group is nearly two and a half times that of the remaining 493 index constituents, a ratio almost identical to the peak of the dot.com bubble. In our view, the combination of high concentration and elevated valuations poses considerable risk to passive equity investors, perhaps more than any other time in contemporary history.

The large valuation gap is based on growth stocks at historically rich valuations, while value stocks look to be in-line with their long-term average valuation. The portfolio, however, not only trades at a large discount to the value index but it also trades at a small discount to its own historical average. This has been achieved, we believe, without assuming undue risk. The portfolio exhibits an interesting balance of stocks trading at extremely attractive valuations for reasons we view as temporary and/or exaggerated, and others trading at higher multiples but well below intrinsic value considering the quality of the businesses. Citigroup is an example that exemplifies the former, while F5 Inc. the latter—these are among the two largest positions in the portfolio.

<sup>1</sup> "Magnificent 7" constituents: Apple, Microsoft, Amazon, Alphabet, Meta Platforms, Nvidia, and Tesla

Past performance is no guarantee of future results

Citigroup has approximately 200 million customer accounts, approximately \$2 trillion in assets, and more than \$1 trillion in deposits. Its scale advantages would be nearly impossible to replicate. Nonetheless, the stock trades at less than 9x consensus forward earnings, less than 5x our estimate of normal earnings, and half of book value—a hard-to-believe valuation, in our view. The difference between consensus earnings and normal earnings is largely explained by elevated expenses related to 1) its investment in improved risk control functions and 2) tied up capital in businesses that have been designated for sale. As these items correct, the company's return on tangible equity should revert toward peer/historical levels and earnings should improve significantly. Meanwhile, we are reassured by the conservative amount of capital on its balance sheet (common equity tier 1 ratio of 13.5%) and the substantial return of capital to shareholders (dividend yield of more than 4% and a payout yield considerably higher than that). While we believe the operational improvements are highly achievable, Citi's valuation is attractive without it. This, combined with the attractive risk profile provides a considerable margin of safety.

F5 provides mission-critical software to corporate IT departments. F5's products help manage heavy and unpredictable application traffic while also implementing important security protocols. Once installed, removing or changing F5's products is difficult and costly, which results in high customer retention and recurring revenues. In addition to a predictable cash flow stream, F5 has a net cash balance sheet and attractive secular growth tailwinds in modern applications and multicloud networking. The stock trades at 12x normal earnings and 9x EV/normal EBIT, a bargain for a business with the aforementioned risk profile. The company appears to be misclassified as a commoditized IT hardware provider—it has always sold some of its products as hardware appliances, it falls in the communications equipment GICS industry, and is generally covered by sell side analysts following hardware. This misunderstanding creates opportunity. The stock's valuation represents that of a low margin, low return hardware company, while its economics represent that of the high-quality software company it actually is. The value of F5's products has always been the underlying software it delivers, sometimes on a standalone basis, sometimes via its hardware appliance. The company has 80% gross margins, which is double that of the hardware industry and in-line with the software industry. Recently reported earnings have been depressed by growth investments in R&D and marketing along with industry-wide IT spending delays that have impacted new sales, which should be temporary and normalize in due course.

*(continued)*

# LARGE CAP DIVERSIFIED VALUE

## ATTRIBUTION ANALYSIS – 4Q23 & 2023

The Hotchkis & Wiley Large Cap Diversified Value portfolio (gross and net of management fees) outperformed the Russell 1000 Value Index in the fourth quarter of 2023. The portfolio's exposure to financials, both the overweight and positive stock selection, was the largest positive contributor in the quarter. Stock selection in technology and healthcare also worked well, as did the underweight in consumer staples. The overweight allocation to energy, the index's only negative sector, was the largest performance detractor. Stock selection in communication services and consumer discretionary also detracted, as did the underweight in real estate.

The portfolio also outperformed the Russell 1000 Value Index over the full calendar year, by a comfortable margin (gross and net of management fees). The portfolio's exposure to technology, both the overweight and positive stock selection, was the largest positive contributor in the quarter. Stock selection in industrials, healthcare, and financials also helped relative performance over the year. We had found few attractive opportunities in consumer staples and utilities which also worked in our favor, as the underweight positions helped. Stock selection in communication services hurt relative performance. The overweight position and stock selection in energy was also a performance detractor in the year.

## LARGEST INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTORS – 4Q23

Ericsson (ERIC) is the largest vendor of hardware and software needed to operate wireless networks outside China. Ericsson's margins have been modestly below normal as management turns around its mismanaged Cloud Software & Services segment. Valuation is attractive even if Ericsson's competitors do not lose market share, but we believe there is a growing opportunity to benefit from problems facing its key competitors. Ericsson's stock rallied in December following AT&T's announcement of a multi-year deal with Ericsson to deploy commercial scale Open Radio Access Network (Open RAN) in the US.

US Bancorp (USB) is the 5th largest bank in the US by assets with a strong market position in the Mid-West and Western US and above average core profitability. US Bancorp's franchise is very attractive and was further improved by its acquisition of Union Bank from MUFG as the merger offers the potential for substantial cost synergies and will materially increase its market share in its core western US markets. The stock's strong performance during the quarter was driven by growing confidence among investors that a recession is less likely to occur, and that the Federal Reserve will begin cutting interest rates in 2024.

Citigroup (C) is the 4th largest US bank by assets with approximately \$2 trillion in total assets. Investment in its IT, compliance and risk capabilities have pressured margins and returns over recent years obscuring the banks strong core franchise. As Citi completes this investment program over the next year or two, we expect expenses to decline and margins and returns to move toward management's targets as well as those produced by peers. On our estimates of normal earnings Citigroup is an attractive value. Citi performed well during the quarter due to a decline in rates and increased confidence that Citi will see an inflection in its costs beginning in the second half of 2024.

## LARGEST INDIVIDUAL DETRACTORS – 4Q23

APA Corp. (APA) is an independent E&P operating in the North Sea, onshore in Egypt, and in the Midland and Delaware basins in the Permian, as well as in Suriname through a JV with Total offshore. Recent exploration success in Suriname and Egypt has allowed APA to de-emphasize spending on lower returning assets in the US and North Sea. Given APA's production sharing contracts and relatively modest corporate production decline rate, the company can maintain its dividend and fund its growth capex plans at \$50 oil. Management targets shareholder return and debt paydown with its considerable free cash flow generation at current commodity price levels. Total, APA's partner in Suriname, funds a large majority of initial Suriname development capex leading to very attractive incremental reinvestment rates for APA in this region. Finally, APA's LNG contract with Cheniere is an option on non-US gas prices. APA underperformed during the quarter, as it traded down in sympathy with lower oil and gas prices.

Marathon Oil Corp. (MRO) is an independent E&P operating primarily onshore United States. Internationally, MRO owns valuable free cash flow generative assets and equity investments in gas processing and LNG facilities in Equatorial Guinea. MRO has a leading position in multiple unconventional resource plays in the United States and returns significant capital to shareholders. The energy market had been underearning versus normal levels of profitability and is now generating significant FCF in what could be a perennially undersupplied market. Recent performance for Marathon was related to the decline in energy prices.

*(continued)*

# LARGE CAP DIVERSIFIED VALUE

NOV Inc. (NOV) headquartered in Houston, is a leading diversified provider of oilfield capital equipment, consumables and services, providing rig kits for onshore and offshore rigs, downhole tools, tubulars and tubular inspection, and manufacturing of both onshore and offshore production and completions equipment. NOV maintains a top two or three market position in most of its business lines and should earn attractive returns in a more normalized oil price environment. The majority of NOV's product lines should experience

significant increases in volumes and pricing as oilfield activity increases, while longer-term the earnings power of Rig Aftermarket business should also improve given a very large installed base. NOV underperformed during the quarter, as management reduced guidance for FY2023 free cash flow generation, despite better than expected earnings performance, and oil and gas prices were weak.

Net of fee composite performance as of 12/31/23: 19.69%, 14.95%, and 9.90% for 1-, 5-, and 10-year, respectively. Net performance results are presented after management fees and all trading expenses but before custodial fees.

**All investments contain risk and may lose value.** This commentary is for general information only and should not be relied on for investment advice or recommendation of any particular security, strategy, or investment product.

Portfolio characteristics and attribution are based on a representative Large Cap Diversified Value portfolio. Attribution is an analysis of the portfolio's return relative to the index, is calculated using daily holdings information and does not reflect management fees and other transaction costs and expenses; interaction effect is combined with stock selection. Returns can differ from certain client portfolio(s) due to data differences, cash flows, trading, and other activity. Specific securities identified are the three largest contributors (or detractors) to the portfolio's performance relative to the index. Other securities may have been the best and worst performers on an absolute basis.

The securities reflected herein are intended for illustrative purposes only, were selected to demonstrate the investment process as a non-performance based criteria and are not a recommendation to buy or sell specific securities. There is no assurance that the securities discussed will remain in the portfolio or that securities sold have not been repurchased. The securities discussed do not represent the entire portfolio, may only represent a small portion of the portfolio and should not assume the securities discussed were or will be profitable or that recommendations made in the future will be profitable or will equal the performance of the securities discussed. H&W's opinions regarding these securities are subject to change at any time, for any reason, without notice. Certain client portfolio(s) may or may not hold the securities discussed due to each account's guideline restrictions and other relevant considerations.

The value discipline used in managing accounts in the Large Cap Diversified Value strategy may prevent or limit investment in major stocks in the S&P 500, Russell 1000 Value and Russell 1000 Growth and returns may not be correlated to the indexes. Composite performance is available at [www.hwcm.com](http://www.hwcm.com), located on the strategy's Performance tab along with important disclosures included in the strategy's [GIPS Report](#); quarterly characteristics and portfolio holdings are located on the Portfolio and Literature tabs. For a list showing every holding's contribution to the overall account's performance and portfolio activity for a given time period, contact H&W at [hotchkisandwiley@hwcm.com](mailto:hotchkisandwiley@hwcm.com). Portfolio information is subject to the firm's portfolio holdings disclosure policy.

Russell Investment Group is the source and owner of the Russell Index data contained herein (and all trademarks related thereto), which may not be redistributed. The information herein is not approved by Russell. H&W and Russell sectors are based on the Global Industry Classification Standard by MSCI and Standard and Poor's.

The Russell 1000® Value Index measures the performance of those Russell 1000® companies with lower price-to-book ratios and lower forecasted growth values. The Russell 1000® Growth Index measures the performance of those Russell 1000® Index companies with higher price-to-book ratios and higher forecasted growth values. The S&P 500® Index is a broad-based unmanaged index of 500 stocks, which is widely recognized as representative of the equity market in general.

Equity securities may have greater risks and price volatility than U.S. Treasuries and bonds, where the price of these securities may decline due to various company, industry and market factors. Investing in foreign as well as emerging markets involves additional risk such as greater volatility, political, economic, and currency risks and differences in accounting methods.

**Style Risk:** A value-oriented investment approach involves the risk that value stocks may remain undervalued or may not appreciate in value as anticipated. Value stocks can perform differently from the market as a whole or from other types of stocks and may be out of favor with investors and underperform growth stocks for varying periods of time.

**Market Disruption:** The global coronavirus pandemic has caused disruption in the global economy and extreme fluctuations in global capital and financial markets. H&W is unable to predict the impact caused by coronavirus pandemic, which has the potential to negatively impact the firm's investment strategies and investment opportunities.

Information contained in this material may represent or be based on forward-looking statements. Due to various risks and uncertainties, actual events/results or performance of the strategy may differ materially from those reflected or contemplated in such forward-looking statements. Information based on forecasts, proprietary or third-party estimates cannot be guaranteed and are subject to change. Information obtained from independent sources is considered reliable, but H&W cannot guarantee its accuracy or completeness.

Portfolio managers' opinions and data included in this commentary are as of December 31, 2023. Any discussion or view of a security, an asset class/segment, industry/sector and/or investment type are not investment recommendations, should not be assumed to be profitable, and are subject to change without notice.

**Past performance is no guarantee of future results**

©2024 Hotchkis & Wiley. All rights reserved. Any unauthorized use or disclosure is prohibited.

[WWW.HWCM.COM](http://WWW.HWCM.COM)