



# INVESTOR

## Baron Global Advantage Fund

### A Distinct Approach to Global Investing

The most transformative secular growth trends in the world today are global in nature. Internet and mobile disruption, health care innovation, robotics and AI, energy efficiency, paperless payments – these and other secular shifts are all happening on a global scale. Many leading businesses are global, selling and sourcing their products and services across the world.

Moreover, the world’s economy is globalizing at an unprecedented rate. In 2003, when Forbes published its inaugural Global 2000 list of largest companies, 43 were based in China/Hong Kong. In 2018, just 15 years later, that number had grown to 291. Meanwhile, the U.S.’s share of the global pie is shrinking. In 1960, U.S. GDP represented 40% of global GDP. By 2017, this country’s share had shrunk to 24%, and it is projected to continue to decline. Many disruptive changes originate in the U.S. and the repercussions undoubtedly reverberate globally. However, over the last decade, the drivers of global growth have come from overseas.

A global approach gives Baron Global Advantage Fund the flexibility to capture opportunities in the market wherever they might arise! In today’s economy, opportunity is borderless. No country or region has a monopoly on good ideas or good entrepreneurs. We can invest in e-commerce and cloud services leader **Amazon.com, Inc.** in the U.S., e-commerce behemoth **Alibaba Group Holding Limited** in China, and **argenx SE**, a Dutch small cap biotech pioneer. Because we are not restricted by geographic boundaries, we need not forego investments in these or any other stocks. Many of the businesses we invest in are also global, positioning themselves to take maximum advantage of global secular growth trends and the globalization of the world’s economy.

This freedom to invest regardless of borders allows us to think more broadly and more horizontally. We believe horizontal expertise – the ability to compare business models across sectors, sub-industries, regions, and market caps – is key to effective capital allocation. Orit Gadiesh, chairman of Bain & Co., coined the term “expert-generalist” to describe

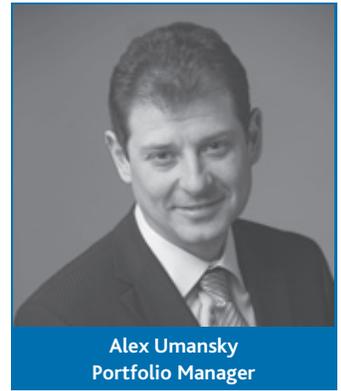
this approach – someone who has studied widely and deeply in many fields and applies insights from them to investing.

#### Baron Global Advantage Fund

Baron Global Advantage Fund is managed by Alex Umansky, who brings over 25 years of research and investment management experience to what we believe is a truly distinct approach to investing in global equities. The Fund is differentiated by its high conviction – 40 to 50 stocks compared

with its Morningstar peer group average of 170 stocks, high active share of 88.2%, low turnover of 25.4%, and long-term view of risk, return, and volatility.

As seen below, this approach has produced outstanding results during the almost seven years since the Fund’s launch. The Fund has a 5-star rating from Morningstar overall, as well as for the 3- and 5-year periods, and is ranked in the 1st and 3rd percentiles for its 3- and 5-year performance, respectively.



Alex Umansky  
Portfolio Manager

#### Baron Global Advantage Fund Performance as of 12/31/2018 (annualized)\*

	1 Year	3 Year	5 Year	Since Inception**
Baron Global Advantage Fund	(3.66)%	12.66%	8.20%	11.05%
MSCI ACWI Growth Index	(8.13)%	7.24%	5.72%	8.13%
Morningstar World Large Stock Category Average	(9.64)%	5.69%	3.72%	N/A
Morningstar Percentile Rank	10%	1%	3%	N/A

\* Institutional Shares. For Retail and R6 Shares, visit [www.BaronFunds.com](http://www.BaronFunds.com).

\*\* 4/30/2012

Performance listed in the above table is net of annual operating expenses. Annual expense ratio for the Institutional Share Class as of fiscal year ended 12/31/2017 was 1.59%, but the net annual expense ratio was 0.90% (restated to reflect management fee reduction from 1.00% to 0.85% and current fee waivers) (net of the Adviser’s fee waivers which the Adviser has contractually agreed to for so long as it serves as adviser to the Fund).

*The performance data quoted represents past performance. Past performance is no guarantee of future results. The investment return and principal value of an investment will fluctuate; an investor’s shares, when redeemed, may be worth more or less than their original cost. The Adviser has reimbursed certain Fund expenses (by contract as long as BAMCO, Inc. is the adviser to the Fund) and the Fund’s transfer agency expenses may be reduced by expense offsets from an unaffiliated transfer agent, without which performance would have been lower. Current performance may be lower or higher than the performance data quoted. For performance information current to the most recent month end, visit [www.BaronFunds.com](http://www.BaronFunds.com) or call 1-800-99BARON.*

The Fund’s historical performance was impacted by gains from IPOs and/or secondary offerings, and there is no guarantee that these results can be repeated or that the Fund’s level of participation in IPOs and secondary offerings will be the same in the future.

Please refer to p. 5 for Morningstar disclosures.

## Disruptive Change

With more than 42,000 publicly traded companies in the world, global equities present a formidable market in which to invest. How do we find the stocks that we think represent the most promising investment opportunities among the thousands of possibilities?

We focus on disruptive change. We believe the only constant in the world's economy is change. Understanding whether a change is real, sustainable, and material, and identifying which companies will be disrupted and dislocated and which will grow stronger and bigger is key to finding the best investment opportunities, especially in the global space. Examples of disruptive change include:

- Digitization
- Big data
- Cloud computing
- Machine learning
- Artificial intelligence
- Autonomous driving
- Virtual reality
- Blockchain
- CRISPR

The Fund invests in Big Ideas – unique, competitively advantaged companies that are agents or beneficiaries of disruptive change on a global scale. These are companies that are in it for the long term, investing in game changers such as digitization, artificial intelligence, and machine learning that reach across multiple industries and are set to transform the world as we know it. They have visionary leaders that inspire and encourage a culture of constant innovation and improvement. They are unique.

## A Differentiated Investment Approach

To identify the companies that we believe are the agents and/or beneficiaries of disruption, we take a multi-pronged approach, looking for unique companies we believe have open-ended growth potential, excellent management, and sustainable competitive advantages, at an attractive valuation.

**Growth potential** First, we must be convinced that the company can become materially larger, reaching what we call its endgame. To do so, we first determine the size of the market opportunity. Then we look at the company's current market share and estimate the market share it will need to capture to meet our objective or endgame. We project cash flows based on different growth rates over different periods of time and calculate the projected EBIT. Then we bring our calculations back to present value. The process is akin to the one used to ascertain discounted cash flow, except the reverse.

In evaluating growth potential, we favor companies with:

- **Secular, organic growth**
- **Free cash flow and higher or rising returns on invested capital**
- **Low capital intensity**
- **Positive optionality** (hidden assets, unexpected/mispriced monetization opportunities)
- **Secular, organic growth** We prefer companies that grow organically over the long term. Organic growth is repeatable and we think more sustainable, whereas growth by acquisition is neither. In addition, acquisitions can carry higher risk, as many are bought at a premium and/or may have packaged themselves for sale by overearning while underinvesting in growth.
- **Free cash flow and higher or rising returns on invested capital (ROIC)** We run screens for free cash flow yield and ROIC as a source of investment ideas. We prefer free cash flow as a valuation measure because unlike earnings, it cannot be manipulated. We also

emphasize ROIC, as it demonstrates whether growth can be profitable and is the metric most correlated to future stock performance. Growth for the sake of growth is not sustainable.

- **Asset light, low capital intensity businesses** We like asset light, low capital intensity businesses because as they scale, margins can expand significantly. Companies such as Amazon and Alibaba, which have built online platforms connecting third party vendors with customers, illustrate this concept. After the platform is built, the cost involved in adding new businesses or customers is de minimus, meaning that the incremental margins on these additions is exceptionally high.
- **Positive optionality** We have found that the market tends to undervalue or even ignore businesses, products, or services a company may have that are peripheral to its core business. For example, most of the analysts covering **Alphabet, Inc.** focus on the advertising business generated by the Google search engine and YouTube video site, with little or no attention paid to the rest of Alphabet's portfolio, encompassing everything from internet-beaming hot air balloons to self-driving cars to Google Cloud. We are invested in Alphabet based on our thinking that the optionality offered by these other investments is enormous, and we do not have to pay much to own them.

**Amazon.com, Inc.**, our largest investment in the portfolio, serves as a good illustration of how we calculate growth potential. As of the time of this writing, the company is valued at \$770 billion. It seems astonishing that Amazon can grow much larger at this stage, yet we project the company will double or triple in size because e-commerce is only 13% penetrated in the U.S. In other words, 87% of all retail business in the U.S. is conducted through physical locations. Amazon's share of e-commerce is currently 28%, which means that it has just 3.6% of its total addressable market, implying a massive runway for growth. Another one of its many businesses, Amazon Cloud, is operating in a market that is just 4% penetrated, as only 4% of all workloads today are being processed in the cloud. By our calculation, Amazon has a leadership position in eight trillion-dollar markets. With these numbers in mind, we can foresee an endgame that is two to three times Amazon's present value.

**Company specific criteria** In addition to the size of the potential market, we develop a company thesis for each of our investments. In particular, we seek companies with the following attributes:

- **Uniqueness**
- **Sustainable competitive advantage**
- **Platform business**
- **Exceptional management**
- **Recurring revenue**
- **Pricing power**
- **Uniqueness** The uniqueness of a company is determined by its culture, which is shaped by the values and vision of its leaders. Jeff Bezos' mantra is "every day is day 1." We think this vision is the force behind Amazon's 20-year story of innovation and relentless focus on the future that, in turn, has produced – and we believe will continue to produce – outstanding results for investors.
- **Sustainable competitive advantage** To build a sustainable competitive advantage in today's knowledge-based economy, we

GICS Sector	Holding	% of Net Assets
Consumer Discretionary	Amazon.com, Inc.	4.9
Communication Services	Naspers Limited	4.9
Communication Services	Alphabet Inc.	4.8
Health Care	argenx SE	4.7
Consumer Discretionary	Alibaba Group Holding Limited	4.7
Health Care	Veeva Systems Inc.	4.0
Information Technology	Mellanox Technologies Ltd.	3.9
Financials	Housing Development Finance Corporation Limited	3.7
Information Technology	Constellation Software, Inc.	3.6
Information Technology	EPAM Systems, Inc.	3.5

believe that a company must continually improve – the Japanese term is *kaizen* – and innovate. If a company stands still while its competitors move ahead, it will inevitably fall behind, lose its edge, and die. We think this is especially true given increasing digitization, or the shift to computer-processed information. In the digital era, innovation happens at a much more rapid pace than in the past as companies can iterate much faster, assessing the success of a product or service and challenging its capabilities to deliver something better. Digitization has moved well beyond traditional IT companies and is penetrating and transforming many other industries, including health care, banking, commerce, and consumer goods and services.

- **Platform business** About half of Baron Global Advantage Fund is invested in companies that have built a platform that others can use to easily connect their businesses, market and sell their products and services, and co-create value. The other half are on their way to becoming platform companies, in our view. Users, sellers, providers and others typically seek to work with these businesses, leading to better monetization opportunities over time. We think that, as a group, platform companies offer the most significant growth opportunities in the global market today as they benefit from economies of scale, the network effect, and formidable barriers to entry. We think our focus on identifying and investing in future platform companies gives us a competitive edge, as we are getting in on the ground floor where we see massive potential growth opportunities.
- **Exceptional management** Management can make or break a company. A great product or service will only rarely, if ever, save a mismanaged company. In addition, we believe a firm's unique culture – the shared values, attitudes, standards, and beliefs – is shaped by management. For these reasons, our assessment of the strength of a company's leadership is at the core of our research process. We look for a track record of successful capital allocation with proven ability to reinvest excess cash flows at high rates of return.
- **Recurring revenue and diverse customer base** From both a business and investor perspective, the recurring revenue model has many benefits, including predictable and measurable revenue, higher levels of customer retention, steady and repeatable cash flow, reduced risk and greater opportunities for growth. We also prefer a diverse customer base as it helps reduce risk as well since the loss of one or two customers will not break the bank. Our concentrated portfolio necessitates that each of our holdings is diversified.
- **Pricing power** We prefer companies that have pricing power tied to the utility of their product or service rather than a monopolistic grip on that product or service. For instance, we like software as a service businesses, which use a subscription revenue model and typically become deeply embedded in customer workflows. This dynamic allows the vendor to raise prices in exchange for incremental improvements. As Warren Buffett puts it, "if you've got the power to raise prices without losing business to a competitor, you've got a very good business." We agree.

Core holding **illumina, Inc.**, the leading provider of next generation DNA sequencing instruments and consumables, is an excellent example of what we are looking for in a company. DNA sequencing – the reading and analysis of the three billion chemical "letters" in a human genome – is a transformative technology, with potentially far-reaching impact in the prevention and treatment of disease. Illumina, which was founded in 1998, was at the forefront of the genome sequencing revolution, and its machines now generate 90% of all DNA sequence data. Its razor/razor blade business model means that a high percentage of its revenue is recurring, generating steady cash flow even when sales of its systems lag. Illumina's user base also continues to expand. It is becoming increasingly common, for instance, to sequence a patient's cancer tumor to determine custom therapies and targeted drugs. Genome sequencing is also starting to become a foundational part of patients' health records. We believe this exceedingly well-run company will continue to benefit from increasing adoption of DNA sequencing.

**Valuation** We estimate the intrinsic value by forecasting the key financial metrics – revenue, margins, capex, depreciation, amortization, etc. – of every company we invest in and will only make the investment if we can buy it at 20% discount to that value. We also sell when the price moves up to over 20% above intrinsic value estimates.

We often find hidden value by looking for underappreciated companies due to market inefficiencies. Many of the platform companies in the Fund fall into this category. Market inefficiencies include:

- Lack of easily understood comparables
- Overemphasis on short-term results
- Use of conventional valuation metrics
- **Lack of "comparables" / mischaracterization of a company's business** For lack of a better fit, in its early years, Amazon was labeled the online Walmart. Without an online presence, Walmart's market penetration was high and its growth virtually flat. It also had thin profit margins. Applying that Walmart comparative analysis, investors assumed that Amazon's profitability would resemble Walmart's at maturity.

But Amazon has never been just a retailer. Even in its early days it was more of a logistics business, which suggested a better margin structure at maturity than market participants ascribed. Amazon has built an online/digital service platform enabled by massively scalable IT and an unparalleled logistics infrastructure. It has leveraged this platform to become the largest online retailer, largest cloud service provider, a leading streaming service provider and digital content seller, and a major provider of fulfillment (and advertising) services to third-party retailers. It is unique.

Many other holdings in the Fund are unique companies that have been mischaracterized by the market. The recent shakeup of the Global Industry Classification Standard (GICS) underscores this. More than 2,000 stocks were reclassified by sector and sub-industry, including core Fund holdings Alphabet, Alibaba, and **Facebook, Inc.**, all of which were moved out of Information Technology.

In fact, we never viewed any of these companies as true IT businesses (apparently GICS now agrees). As none of them sells software, servers, or semiconductor chips, their fundamentals do not correlate with the traditional drivers of growth in IT – corporate technology refresh cycles or government budget flushes and IT infrastructure upgrades. Rather, they have a wide array of businesses and initiatives that sell to different sectors of the economy. And like Amazon, they are all part of the digitization revolution and knowledge-based economy, a long-term mega-trend that is transforming virtually all aspects of modern life.

- **Overemphasis on short-term results** Short-term fluctuations in the market are rarely based on the fundamental strengths or weaknesses of a company. The market will move one way or another in reaction to any manner of macro event that has nothing to do with the intrinsic long-term value of a particular stock. Recency bias is another source of mispricing. Investors tend to overweight the most recent events – the latest earnings report or company news – in their expectations for the future.
- **Use of conventional valuation metrics** A company's price to earnings ratio is typically an easy compare – a high P/E ratio means the company is expensive, and a low P/E ratio means it's inexpensive. We also think it's the worst valuation metric there is. First, earnings can be manipulated. Second, by definition, growth companies are penalizing short-term profits to invest in long-term growth. Because of these shortcomings, we think of the widespread use of P/E ratios as yet another source of mispricing. Instead, as discussed above, we focus on FCF yield and ROIC.

## A Differentiated View of Risk

We define risk as the possibility of a permanent loss of capital. At the securities level we seek to manage risk by investing in what we believe are well-managed high quality companies with low to no leverage, organic growth, a sustainable competitive advantage, recurring revenue, and high ROIC and free cash flow yield. On a portfolio level, we seek to manage risk by investing in companies with multiple end markets that are not necessarily correlated.

In addition, although we are not all that sensitive to short-term macro events, we do take into consideration macroeconomic and geopolitical

concerns such as government regulations, currencies, interest rates, inflation, and the like if we believe they will have a material impact on our investment thesis for a particular company. For instance, there are many regions across the globe in which we are not and likely will not invest anytime soon, because conditions are hostile to the types of investments we look for.

Volatility has become synonymous with risk in many investors' minds, but we don't agree! Risk must be managed, but it is less obvious that volatility should or even can be managed effectively over time. We do not manage for market volatility and we are not striving for short-term consistency. The more concentrated nature of our Fund combined with our focus on long-term disruptors means that we will always be subject to volatility over the near term.

However, over time, as the table below demonstrates, our strategy has worked. On a monthly basis, the Fund beats its benchmark 61% of the time. This is essentially a coin flip. As the time frame increases, the percentage of time the Fund is ahead of its benchmark increases as well. When looked at on a five-year rolling basis, the Fund outperforms its benchmark 100% of the time.

**Baron Global Advantage Fund's  
Outperformance Based on Rolling Returns\***

	1-month	3-month	1-Year	3-Year	5-Year
MSCI ACWI Growth Index	61%	63%	70%	82%	100%
MSCI ACWI Index	65%	65%	75%	91%	100%

\*Since inception of April 30, 2012, as of 12/31/18

Calculation is based on monthly returns

These results are not an accident. They are a direct outcome of our long-term approach to risk and return. We own fewer than half the names of an average global fund, because we believe there are a limited number of truly compelling investment ideas at any given time. As Warren Buffett puts it, "Very few people have gotten rich on their seventh best idea." We acknowledge that the Fund may not be the best fit for the short-term investor who is concerned about volatility because of the increased probability of exiting at the wrong time. However, we believe the Fund is an excellent choice for the investor who is willing to overlook short-term noise in the interest of maximizing potential alpha over the long term.

## Conclusion

Markets have been exceptionally volatile of late, with investors rushing to the exits in reaction to interest rate hikes, trade war tensions, government shutdowns, geopolitical crises, signs of a slowing global economy, and other developments. This kind of environment, when investors are distracted by near-term events, typically does not favor our holdings, which tend to trade at higher multiples.

We tend to do much better when market participants are focused on the future – three to five years out – at which point our companies, which are disruptors or beneficiaries of disruptive change, come up as the obvious choices. When people are willing to think about the future, they are willing to pay higher multiples for higher quality businesses with outstanding growth potential. Although we cannot predict when this will happen, we expect that investors eventually will refocus their sights on the future as they always have.

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*You should consider the investment objectives, risks, charges, and expenses of the Fund carefully before investing. The prospectus and summary prospectus contain this and other information about the Fund and can be obtained from the Fund's distributor, Baron Capital, Inc., by calling 1-800-99BARON or visiting [www.BaronFunds.com](http://www.BaronFunds.com). Please read them carefully before investing.*

**Risks:** Non-U.S. investments may involve additional risks to those inherent in U.S. investments, including exchange-rate fluctuations, political or economic instability, the imposition of exchange controls, expropriation, limited disclosure and illiquid markets. This may result in greater share price volatility. Specific risks associated with investing in small and medium-sized companies include that the securities may be thinly traded and they may be more difficult to sell during market downturns. Even though the Fund is diversified, it may establish significant positions where the Adviser has the greatest conviction. This could increase volatility of the Fund's returns.

The discussions of the companies herein are not intended as advice to any person regarding the advisability of investing in any particular security. The views expressed in this report reflect those of the respective portfolio manager only through the end of the period stated in this report. The portfolio manager's views are not intended as recommendations or investment advice to any person reading this report and are subject to change at any time based on market and other conditions and Baron has no obligation to update them.

Portfolio holdings as a percentage of total investments as of December 31, 2018 for securities mentioned are as follows: **Amazon.com, Inc.** -4.9%; **Alibaba Group Holding Limited** - 4.7%; **argenx SE** - 4.7%; **Alphabet Inc.** - 4.8%; **Illumina, Inc.** - 3.2%; **Facebook, Inc.** - 2.7%.

The Fund may not achieve its objectives. Portfolio holdings are subject to change. Current and future portfolio holdings are subject to risk.

**Baron Global Advantage Fund** Institutional Share Class is in the **Morningstar US Fund World Large Stock Category**. Morningstar calculates the category average using the Morningstar Fractional Weighting methodology. Morningstar rankings are based on total returns and do not include sales charges. Total returns do account for management, administrative, and 12b-1 fees and other costs automatically deducted from fund assets. As of 12/31/18, the category consisted of 901, 729, and 618 share classes for the 1-, 3-, and 5-year periods. **Baron Global Advantage Fund** Institutional Share Class ranked in the 10th, 1st, and 3rd percentiles, respectively.

As of 12/31/2018, Morningstar had awarded **Baron Global Advantage Fund** Institutional Share Class 5 stars, 5 stars, and 5 stars for its 3-year, 5-year, and overall performance, respectively.

The Morningstar Rating™ for funds, or "star rating", is calculated for managed products (including mutual funds, variable annuity and variable life subaccounts, exchange-traded funds, closed-end funds, and separate accounts) with at least a three-year history. Exchange-traded funds and open-ended mutual funds are considered a single population for comparative purposes. It is calculated based on a Morningstar Risk-Adjusted Return measure that accounts for variation in a managed product's monthly excess performance, placing more emphasis on downward variations and rewarding consistent performance. The top 10% of products in each product category receive 5 stars, the next 22.5% receive 4 stars, the next 35% receive 3 stars, the next 22.5% receive 2 stars, and the bottom 10% receive 1 star. The Overall Morningstar Rating for a managed product is derived from a weighted average of the performance figures associated with its three-, five-, and 10-year (if applicable) Morningstar Rating metrics. The weights are: 100% three-year rating for 36-59 months of total returns, 60% five-year rating/40% three-year rating for 60-119 months of total returns, and 50% 10-year rating/30% five-year rating/20% three-year rating for 120 or more months of total returns. While the 10-year overall star rating formula seems to give the most weight to the 10-year period, the most recent 3-year period actually has the greatest impact because it is included in all three rating periods.

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**Active Share** is a term used to describe the share of a portfolio's holdings that differ from that portfolio's benchmark index. It is calculated by comparing the weight of each holding in the Fund to that holding's weight in the benchmark. Positions with either a positive or negative weighting versus the benchmark have Active Share. An Active Share of 100% implies zero overlap with the benchmark. Active Share was introduced in 2006 in a study by Yale academics M. Cremers and A. Petajisto, as a measure of active portfolio management.

## Baron Sales & Relationship Management

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## PRODUCTS WE OFFER

We offer seventeen mutual funds in retail, institutional, and R6 share classes; collective investment trusts, separately managed accounts, sub-advisory services and offshore vehicles.

### STRATEGIES

BARON DISCOVERY STRATEGY  
BARON SMALL CAP GROWTH STRATEGY  
BARON FOCUSED GROWTH STRATEGY  
BARON SMALL TO MID CAP GROWTH STRATEGY  
BARON MID CAP GROWTH STRATEGY  
BARON DURABLE ADVANTAGE STRATEGY  
BARON LARGE CAP GROWTH STRATEGY  
BARON ALL CAP GROWTH STRATEGY  
BARON HIGH GROWTH STRATEGY  
BARON EMERGING MARKETS STRATEGY  
BARON GLOBAL ADVANTAGE STRATEGY  
BARON INTERNATIONAL GROWTH STRATEGY  
BARON ENERGY & RESOURCES STRATEGY  
BARON HEALTH CARE STRATEGY  
BARON REAL ESTATE STRATEGY  
BARON REAL ESTATE INCOME STRATEGY

### MUTUAL FUNDS

BARON DISCOVERY FUND  
BARON GROWTH FUND  
BARON SMALL CAP FUND  
BARON FOCUSED GROWTH FUND  
BARON ASSET FUND  
BARON DURABLE ADVANTAGE FUND  
BARON FIFTH AVENUE GROWTH FUND  
BARON OPPORTUNITY FUND  
BARON PARTNERS FUND  
BARON EMERGING MARKETS FUND  
BARON INTERNATIONAL GROWTH FUND  
BARON GLOBAL ADVANTAGE FUND  
BARON ENERGY AND RESOURCES FUND  
BARON HEALTH CARE FUND  
BARON REAL ESTATE FUND  
BARON REAL ESTATE INCOME FUND  
BARON WEALTHBUILDER FUND

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