



# INVESTOR

## Baron Small Cap Fund

### A Differentiated Approach to Small-Cap Investing

As a firm that got its start investing in small-cap stocks nearly four decades ago, we are long believers in the potential for active managers to generate alpha and sustainable, long-term returns in this space. In addition to providing diversification, we think the breadth, diversity, and relative lack of coverage of this equity asset class is tailor made for the acumen and selectivity of a skilled active manager. The unique characteristics of the small-cap space create opportunities for managers like us who have the capacity to engage in comprehensive research to discover promising companies with great characteristics and opportunities for growth that we can invest in for the long term.

#### Baron Small Cap Fund

We launched Baron Small Cap Fund in 1997 with Cliff Greenberg as portfolio manager. Cliff is a veteran investor with 37 years of experience across multiple market cycles and investment environments. One of the Firm’s longest-tenured portfolio managers, Cliff is Co-CIO at Baron and once served as director of research. He has been instrumental in building Baron’s investment team – now numbering 37 investment professionals including 15 portfolio managers. David Goldsmith has served as assistant portfolio manager of the Fund since 2016.

Cliff takes a distinctive approach that sets him apart from his peers in a number of key respects, including the types of names he favors, the number of stocks he holds and concentration of holdings, the length of time he holds them, and his management of risk.

As set forth in the table below, this approach has resulted in solid performance over the 23 plus years since the Fund’s launch. This performance has been achieved with significantly lower risk than average in an asset class that is known for its volatility. The Fund has annualized alpha of 4.49% with beta of 0.98 and up/down capture of 99.90% and 85.27%, respectively, for the three-year period ended December 31, 2020. It has always maintained high active share; its current active share is 95.1%.



**Cliff Greenberg**  
Co-CIO and Portfolio Manager

#### Baron Small Cap Fund Performance as of 12/31/20 (annualized)\*

	1-Year	3-Year	5-Year	10-Year	Since Inception**
Baron Small Cap Fund	40.68%	20.78%	19.88%	14.97%	11.49%
Russell 2000 Growth Index	34.63%	16.20%	16.36%	13.48%	7.43%

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

\*\* 9/30/1997

The Fund has a Morningstar Analyst Rating of Silver, based on its proven and repeatable investment approach; focus on durable, long-term growth; solid, long-term results; and Cliff’s status as a veteran investor backed by Baron’s strong stock-picking culture.

Performance listed in the above table is net of annual operating expenses. Annual expense ratio for the Institutional Share Class as of 9/30/2020 was 1.05%.

*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 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.*

Performance for the Institutional Shares prior to 5/29/2009 is based on the performance of the Retail Shares, which have a distribution fee. The Institutional Shares do not have a distribution fee. If the annual returns for the Institutional Shares prior to 5/29/2009 did not reflect this fee, the returns would be higher.

Please refer to p.5 for Morningstar disclosures.

## A Differentiated Process

We combine fundamental, bottom-up research with a long-term perspective to invest in small-cap growth companies with what we believe have competitive advantages, excellent management, and secular growth opportunities, at an attractive valuation. We supplement this by investing in special situations where we see investment opportunity in a company that is new to the market through a spinoff, IPO, restructuring, or acquisition by a SPAC (special purpose acquisition company); and also in “turnarounds,” companies with a strong business model that have stumbled and have a new management team and plan.

To build and manage our portfolio, we use our extensive research capacity and industry expertise to source promising investment opportunities. Because we invest only in stocks in which we have strong conviction, we hold a limited number of names. As of December 31, 2020, the Fund held 72 stocks, compared with a category average of 169 stocks. The top 10 holdings comprised 28.1% of assets. Our high-conviction, long-term approach, combined with our deep bench of research analysts, means we can do the necessary due diligence to gain in-depth knowledge of the companies we invest in, including engaging their management teams and visiting key facilities.

We favor certain kinds of companies. Our investments typically include:

- Companies that are leaders in their sectors and are often disrupting those industries while strengthening their competitive position
- Companies that we believe have great business models, with visible, recurring, and sustainable revenues and cash flows, and exceptionally high margins
- Companies run by, in our view, sharp, often founding executives, who have proven track records of success and are of high character
- Stocks with trading multiples that we think offer great upside as earnings grow over time and/or multiples expand to recognize the special qualities of these businesses

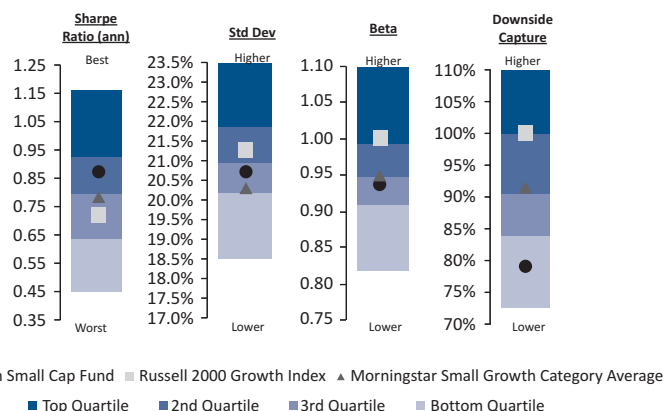
We look for companies with strong and compounding organic revenue growth. Often, strategic and accretive acquisitions add to value creation. We prefer companies with expanding margins, where profits are growing faster than revenue. Another attribute we look for is strong free cash flow that can be used to add value through debt reduction, acquisitions, capital expenditures, share buybacks, or dividends.

We are comfortable with a company that leverages its balance sheet to optimize returns if it is an established business with recurring and predictable free cash flow and debt levels are prudent. For instance, **Bright Horizons Family Solutions, Inc. (BFAM)**, a provider of corporate-sponsored child care, has successfully used leverage for accretive acquisitions of established centers in its highly fragmented market and for geographic expansion.

**Risks:** Risks associated with investing in smaller 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.

We are valuation-conscious, buying only when we think firms are attractively priced relative to their earnings prospects over three to five years. To assess the growth opportunities of an investment, we build a proprietary, company-specific, long-term model focused on key revenue growth drivers, cost structure, profitability, and capital structure. We model five years of forward-looking earnings and financial metrics. Our valuations are done based on our projections applying conservative and reasonable multiples. We stress test for company-specific and market risk. We continuously update our models and thoughts based on new data points and developments.

## Multi-Faceted Risk Management



Source: FactSet SPAR

As seen in the chart above, over the five-year period ended December 31, 2020, the Fund has had better beta, downside capture, and risk-adjusted performance, as measured by its Sharpe ratio, than its peer group average and its benchmark index. It also has lower standard deviation than the index. The excellent risk/return characteristics of Baron Small Cap Fund are no accident. Rather, they are a direct result of our multi-pronged approach to risk that involves:

- Extensive due diligence
- Barbell approach to portfolio weighting
- Focus on non-correlated end markets

**Extensive due diligence** We believe the best risk management starts with knowing the companies in which we invest. Throughout the life of all of our investments, we continue to conduct due diligence and interact with management in order to stay on top of the company’s growth story as it develops. We visit with and speak to our holdings’ management teams multiple times per year. Our sustained level of interaction with management helps sharpen our model inputs and assumptions. Cliff, as portfolio manager, is involved in research on each name and is supported by assistant portfolio manager David Goldsmith and Baron analysts who are industry experts.

**Barbell approach to portfolio weighting** We manage a diversified portfolio with its heaviest weightings in stocks with which we have had long-term success, yet we still believe have considerable upside. This approach dampens volatility of the Fund, since many of these companies are growth companies with business models that are “baked,” are building off established market positions, and have predictable and reliable revenues. We supplement these long-term winners with new ideas that are smaller and younger companies, but that can provide more significant upside and develop into long-term holdings.

As an example, aircraft parts manufacturer **TransDigm Group, Inc. (TDG)** generates recurring cash flow and high margins on after-market replacement parts for airplanes that remain in service for decades. We have held the stock for almost 15 years and have made a 31.6% annualized total return on our initial investment. Another example is **SBA Communications Corp. (SBAC)**, which leases towers to wireless carriers. The company benefits from long-term leases and limited competition due to zoning and licensing obstacles that prevent new entrants into its markets. We have held SBA for over 16 years and have made a 29.1% annualized total return on our initial investment.

**Focus on non-correlated end markets** We also manage risk by investing in businesses across a range of non-correlated end markets. For instance, although we own a number of application software businesses, they serve different end markets, so we believe they are less correlated than they would appear at first glance. **The Trade Desk (TTD)** is involved in media and advertising; **Aspen Technology, Inc. (AZPN)** services process engineering markets; and **Guidewire Software, Inc. (GWRE)** the property and casualty insurance industry. The fate of each of these application software companies will be impacted in large part by how it is transforming its particular end market.

### **Proven Long-Term Approach**

Our approach for the Fund is simple in premise but difficult in execution. We seek to find special, one-of-a-kind companies that have competitive advantages and strong business models, are well managed, and can grow on a compounding basis, in our view. We hope to find these companies when they are smaller and own them as they mature and grow. We stay invested as long as the businesses perform (as the stock should follow) but sell out and replace them in the portfolio if the businesses falter.

As Cliff likes to say, “We water our flowers and cut our weeds.” Consistent with our strategy of watering our flowers, we leverage our experience to resist the urge to sell when a stock takes a hit for non-fundamental reasons such as short-term market volatility or a missed quarter or when it spikes up on good news. We will not hold a stock indefinitely, but strive to maintain a rigorous sell discipline, informed by regular conviction checks to determine whether the investment premise remains intact.

As a result of our long-term investment strategy, many of our holdings have added significant value to the Fund. As of December 31, 2020, about 30% of the Fund’s net assets are invested in securities that have increased five-fold or more since their initial purchase, and another 42% of the Fund’s net assets are invested in securities that have more than doubled since their initial purchase. Together, this means that roughly 72% of net assets are represented by stocks that have more than doubled since our first purchase.

An outgrowth of this approach is that the Fund has about 16% of its assets in stocks that it has held longer than 10 years. The weighted average annualized return on these holdings is 24.9%, which confirms the wisdom of staying invested in these special companies. Another 23% of the Fund’s assets are in stocks that it has held between 5 and 10 years. The weighted average annualized return on these holdings is 24.9%.

Of course, not every stock we invest in performs as well as the examples we have cited. In addition, please note that there is no guarantee that these results will be repeated in the future.

We realize that our approach is unusual for a small-cap fund and we are committed to maintaining our small-cap mandate. In a given year, we will normally sell about a quarter of our holdings and use the proceeds to purchase new small-cap companies or add to existing smaller-cap holdings. By doing so, we remain small cap. Our three-year average turnover is 15.08%. We sell stocks of companies that get acquired, or meet our long-term price targets, or that we like less than new ideas we uncover, and trim our larger-cap holdings to regulate position sizes and be mindful of the small-cap charter of the Fund.

This process keeps the portfolio fresh, and the overall market cap controlled. Year-to-date as of 12/31/20, the weighted average market cap of all stocks added (including both new positions and stocks where we added to our positions) was \$2.0 billion. This contrasts with \$17.4 billion, the weighted average market cap of our sales. Our primary goal is to maximize the returns of the Fund, and we strongly believe we should hold on to our winners and stay involved as our investments flourish, as proven by past results. We believe we would be doing our shareholders a disservice if we were forced to sell out of our big winners too soon and try to replace them with a new position that might not perform as well.

### **New Holdings**

We added five new names in 2020. Concentrations in the Fund holdings also evolve over time. As has been the case for a while, the Fund is currently heavily invested in the Information Technology sector. As technology companies are the driving force behind the innovation and change happening in the U.S. and global economies, it makes sense that this is where we find many of our most compelling investment opportunities. However, our new names range across a wide variety of sectors and sub-industries, as we build the Fund stock by stock from the bottom up, wherever we find opportunities.

A newer IT holding is **Repay Holdings Corporation (RPAY)**, an electronic payments processor. We invested in the company as it merged into a SPAC called ThunderBridge. Like we have done before, we made our investment along with the SPAC, which raised additional capital for Repay to reduce its debt and give it capital to make acquisitions. This program allows us to make a larger investment than we could through an IPO, at a better price. Repay enables borrowers to make loan payments using their debit cards for which it earns a small, volume-based fee. Debit volume is growing by double-digits in consumer finance, while Repay is gaining share as it adds new lenders. Management targets organic revenue growth in the mid-to-high teens and organic EBITDA growth in the high teens. We expect additional upside from accretive M&A.

Two of our newer non-IT purchases are **Clarivate Plc (CCC)** and **Inspire Medical Systems, Inc. (INSP)**. We initially invested in Clarivate through Churchill Capital Corp., a SPAC that was formed last year with the express purpose of building a leading information services company through acquisitions. Churchill combined with Clarivate in May. Clarivate provides comprehensive IP and scientific information/services through a collection of well-known brands that allow clients to discover, protect, and commercialize new ideas. The company's foundation is its highly valuable proprietary data assets (#1 or #2 player in nearly every market where it operates) that are combined with analytical tools to help users apply the data to everyday business problems. The proprietary data and accompanying analytics become an important part of the end users' daily workflow, creating a sticky and predictable business model (>80% subscription revenue) with high levels of recurring revenue (>90% revenue retention). Clarivate is also run by an experienced and highly successful management team.

Inspire is a medical device company that has developed a safe and effective nerve stimulation therapy for patients with moderate to severe obstructive sleep apnea, an estimated addressable market of over \$10 billion. Given its recent progress in securing insurance coverage for its treatment, we think the company is set up for strong growth.

## Conclusion

The market remains strong into the new year, continuing the momentum of the fourth quarter. Business remains strong for many of our holdings, especially those companies that are prospering from the acceleration of digital trends brought on by dealing with the pandemic. There is much optimism about the prospects for companies that suffered, as the end of the pandemic appears to be in sight and the return to normalcy is palpable. We expect strong continued results from most of our investments as the trends set in place in 2020 continue to play out. And other companies should benefit from pent-up demand and their business should bounce back vibrantly. Interest rates remain very low, which bodes well for high stock multiples, and, as rates tick higher, that negatively affects the attractiveness of bonds as an alternative to equities.

We expect the new Biden administration and Democrat-controlled Congress to be fine for business and the market. While we expect corporate and individual tax rates to increase, we think it is likely that there will be additional fiscal stimulus and support programs for individuals, which will add to growth. Hopefully, health care policy will be in capable hands and there will be an efficient and effective rollout of the vaccine and thoughtful oversight of future challenges. Though the country is terribly divided, we are hopeful that the temperature will be turned down, calming tensions, and, even if not, we don't believe it will be an impediment to economic growth or the market outlook.

We are certainly very focused on all these issues, but as long-term investors, we value our companies on how we think they will perform for years to come. How they do for the next six months or so matters less to our thinking about long-term opportunity, performance, and value creation. As always, we remain focused on the quality, management, and opportunities of our portfolio's companies and believe if the businesses perform well, so will the stocks over the long term.



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

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, 2020 for securities mentioned are as follows: **Bright Horizons Family Solutions, Inc.** – 2.2%; **TransDigm Group, Inc.** – 1.5%; **SBA Communications Corp.** – 2.2%; **The Trade Desk** – 2.8%; **Aspen Technology, Inc.** – 2.1%; **Guidewire Software, Inc.** – 3.1%; **Repay Holdings Corporation** – 1.9%; **Clarivate Plc** – 2.3%; **Inspire Medical Systems, Inc.** – 1.2%.

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

The **Morningstar Analyst Rating™** is not a credit or risk rating. It is a subjective evaluation performed by Morningstar's manager research group, which consists of various Morningstar, Inc. subsidiaries ("Manager Research Group"). In the United States, that subsidiary is Morningstar Research Services LLC, which is registered with and governed by the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission. The Manager Research Group evaluates funds based on five key pillars, which are process, performance, people, parent, and price. The Manager Research Group uses this five-pillar evaluation to determine how they believe funds are likely to perform relative to a benchmark over the long term on a risk adjusted basis. They consider quantitative and qualitative factors in their research. For actively managed strategies, people and process each receive a 45% weighting in their analysis, while parent receives a 10% weighting. For passive strategies, process receives an 80% weighting, while people and parent each receive a 10% weighting. For both active and passive strategies, performance has no explicit weight as it is incorporated into the analysis of people and process; price at the share-class level (where applicable) is directly subtracted from an expected gross alpha estimate derived from the analysis of the other pillars. The impact of the weighted pillar scores for people, process and parent on the final Analyst Rating is further modified by a measure of the dispersion of historical alphas among relevant peers. For certain peer groups where standard benchmarking is not applicable, primarily peer groups of funds using alternative investment strategies, the modification by alpha dispersion is not used.

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The Analyst Rating scale is Gold, Silver, Bronze, Neutral, and Negative. For active funds, a Morningstar Analyst Rating of Gold, Silver, or Bronze reflects the Manager Research Group's expectation that an active fund will be able to deliver positive alpha net of fees relative to the standard benchmark index assigned to the Morningstar category. The level of the rating relates to the level of expected positive net alpha relative to Morningstar category peers for active funds. For passive funds, a Morningstar Analyst Rating of Gold, Silver, or Bronze reflects the Manager Research Group's expectation that a fund will be able to deliver a higher alpha net of fees than the lesser of the relevant Morningstar category median or 0. The level of the rating relates to the level of expected net alpha relative to Morningstar category peers for passive funds. For certain peer groups where standard benchmarking is not applicable, primarily peer groups of funds using alternative investment strategies, a Morningstar Analyst Rating of Gold, Silver, or Bronze reflects the Manager Research Group's expectation that a fund will deliver a weighted pillar score above a predetermined threshold within its peer group. Analyst Ratings ultimately reflect the Manager Research Group's overall assessment, are overseen by an Analyst Rating Committee, and are continuously monitored and reevaluated at least every 14 months.

For more detailed information about Morningstar's Analyst Rating, including its methodology, please go to: <https://shareholders.morningstar.com/investorrelations/governance/ComplianceDisclosure/default.aspx>.

**The Morningstar Analyst Rating (i) should not be used as the sole basis in evaluating a fund, (ii) involves unknown risks and uncertainties which may cause the Manager Research Group's expectations not to occur or to differ significantly from what they expected, and (iii) should not be considered an offer or solicitation to buy or sell the fund.**

**Russell 2000® Growth Index** measures the performance of small-sized U.S. companies that are classified as growth. The index is unmanaged. Index performance is not fund performance. An investor cannot invest directly in an index. Russell Investment Group is the source and owner of the trademarks, service marks and copyrights related to the Russell Indexes. Russell is a trademark of Russell Investment Group.

**Alpha** measures the difference between a fund's actual returns and its expected performance, given its level of risk as measured by beta.

**Beta** measures a fund's sensitivity to market movements. The beta of the market is 1.00 by definition.

**Upside Capture** explains how well a fund performs in time periods where the benchmark's returns are greater than zero.

**Diversification** cannot guarantee a profit or protect against loss.

**Downside Capture** measures how well a fund performs in time periods where the benchmark's returns are less than zero.

**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.

**Sharpe Ratio** is a risk-adjusted performance statistic that measures reward per unit of risk. The higher the Sharpe ratio, the better a fund's risk adjusted performance.

**Standard Deviation (Std. Dev.)** measures the degree to which a fund's performance has varied from its average performance over a particular time period. The greater the standard deviation, the greater a fund's volatility (risk).

BAMCO, Inc. is an investment adviser registered with the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC). Baron Capital, Inc. is a limited purpose broker-dealer registered with the SEC and member of the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority, Inc. (FINRA).

### Baron Small Cap Fund Top 10 Holdings as of December 31, 2020

Holding	Sector	% of Net Assets
Installed Building Products, Inc.	Consumer Discretionary	3.4%
Gartner, Inc.	Information Technology	3.2%
SiteOne Landscape Supply, Inc.	Industrials	3.1%
Guidewire Software, Inc.	Information Technology	3.1%
The Trade Desk	Information Technology	2.8%
Floor & Decor Holdings, Inc.	Consumer Discretionary	2.7%
ASGN Incorporated	Industrials	2.6%
Vertiv Holdings, LLC	Industrials	2.6%
Clarivate Plc	Industrials	2.3%
ICON Plc	Health Care	2.3%
<b>Total</b>		<b>28.1%</b>

## Baron Sales & Relationship Management

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We offer 17 mutual funds in retail, institutional, and R6 share classes, collective investment trusts, separately managed accounts, sub-advisory services, UCITS, and other offshore vehicles.

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

### MUTUAL FUNDS

BARON DISCOVERY FUND  
BARON GROWTH FUND  
BARON SMALL CAP FUND  
BARON FOCUSED GROWTH FUND  
BARON ASSET FUND  
BARON FIFTH AVENUE GROWTH FUND  
BARON DURABLE ADVANTAGE FUND  
BARON OPPORTUNITY FUND  
BARON PARTNERS FUND  
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BARON INTERNATIONAL GROWTH FUND  
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