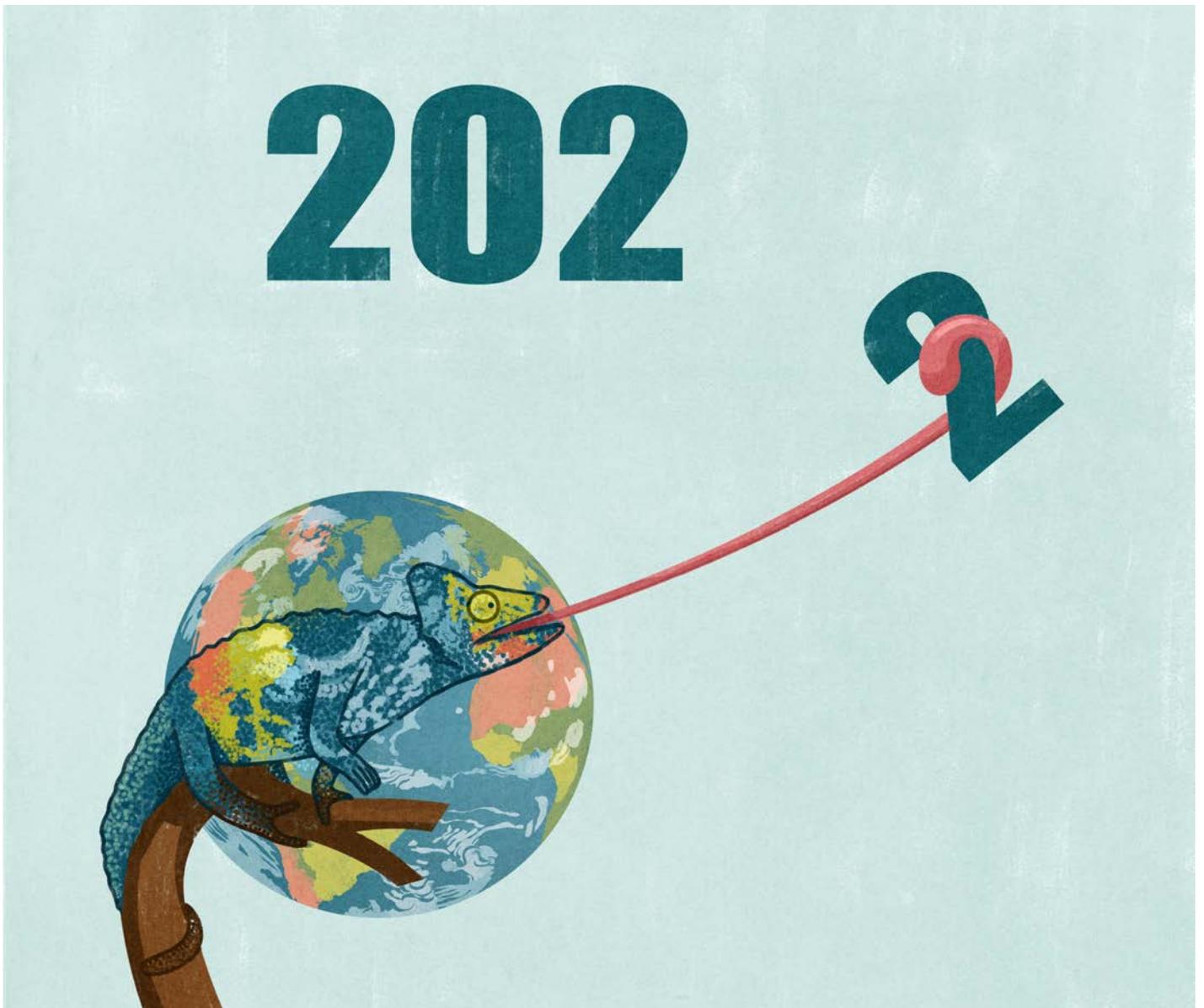


# — Outlook 2022 —

## Perspectives



10 INVESTMENT THEMES FOR THE YEAR AHEAD

## INTRODUCTION

The chameleon is a wonderful reptile that is commonly associated with an ability to change colour to adapt to its environment. However, chameleons also have eyes that can pivot and focus independently of one another, allowing them to observe two objects simultaneously but also providing a full 360-degree arc of vision. Adaptability and a broad range of vision are traits that will prove useful to investors in 2022, as uncertainties run high and the potential for sudden escalation ranges from health issues to geopolitics.

Covid remains ever capable of delivering negative surprises suddenly and rapidly, although hopefully less severely following the advent of vaccines and antiviral remedies. Precarious geopolitical tensions across the globe could also deteriorate at a moment's notice. And if markets detest something as much as uncertainty, it is surprise.

Central banks around the world sit at a major crossroads. Post-pandemic growth and employment has rebounded strongly in many key markets as the vaccine rollouts have unshackled economies. After years of ultra-loose monetary policy, central bankers in the US and UK have indicated that their economies are ready for a withdrawal of that life support. What the outcome will be introduces another uncertainty for markets in the year ahead.

However, 2022 could also bring some positive surprises. The pandemic created a profusion of savers, from the US and China to Europe and Japan. Economic growth would get a boost should they start spending even a fraction of this savings stockpile.

Surprises aside, supply bottlenecks should slowly ease over the course of the year, reducing upward pressure on the prices of goods. But more rapid wage growth could drive prices higher, especially in the US. So inflation that has been transitory in nature so far could become more static.

As the world shifts to a net-zero greenhouse gas emissions pathway, current investment in clean energy is not sufficient to meet the requirements necessary, so we can expect continued reliance on traditional energy sources and the potential expansion of nuclear during the transition.

Our central scenario holds that the current cycle is set to continue. With low inventory levels across key sectors, we expect a positive year for returns, with equities and alternatives (especially real assets) taking the lead in the given environment. In particular within the former, companies with pricing power – the ability to pass on rising costs to their end customers – are well positioned. In this fully charged environment, we must remain flexible and tactical in our portfolios, which is why 2022 will be the year of the chameleon.

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1

## IT'S NOT OVER 'TIL IT'S OVER

The never-ending Covid story

Covid should progressively evolve from a pandemic to an endemic, meaning societies will learn to deal with regular outbreaks over time, like the seasonal flu. Covid-related fatalities should remain low as herd immunity builds in the meantime. Countries with a 'zero Covid' stance will eventually need to re-examine the economic costs these policies have vis-à-vis any benefits.

However, new Covid outbreaks will continue to elicit reactions from the authorities and financial markets in turn. This will drive heightened market **volatility**, widening the potential possibilities for volatility trades and **active management**. Indeed, significant volatility

discrepancies within and between asset classes could open up windows of opportunity.

Active managers can benefit from uncertainty as well as volatility by focusing on selecting companies with the strongest long-term fundamentals. This is particularly true in the **health care** sector, where relative valuations are attractive. Healthcare stocks underpinned by structural growth and capable of generating high cash flow can provide a **defensive** tilt to portfolios, while pharmaceutical and managed-care companies are well suited to inflationary pressure. More broadly, we look for assets that can provide consistent dividends and stable earnings throughout the economic cycle.

Active managers can benefit from uncertainty as well as volatility.

2

## FROM JUST IN TIME TO JUST IN CASE

Corporate underinvestment has exacerbated structural scarcities and capital expenditure is due for a revival

Global demand rebounded so strongly in 2021 that supply/demand imbalances emerged. Years of declining investment in sectors like oil exacerbated the problem. The housing market has also failed to keep pace with demand. At the same time, demand itself has been uneven, with demand for goods rising much faster than for services.

Cash-rich companies supported by strong consumer demand could begin increasing capital expenditure to avoid future supply shortages such as we saw in 2021. Alternatively, they could deploy these cash piles into new mergers and acquisitions (M&A). An increase in M&A will

provide more opportunities for **event-driven** hedge fund strategies which can arbitrage any pricing inefficiencies that occur around such corporate events.

The combination of underinvestment and last year's supply scares position the industrial sector particularly well as a potential recipient of increased corporate spending. With a rising number of the world's corporations committing to net-zero greenhouse gas emissions, current levels of infrastructure investment fall well short of what is needed to ensure a smooth energy transition.



An increase in M&A will provide more opportunities for event-driven hedge-fund strategies.

3

## LOCKED AND LOADED

A cash-rich US consumer bodes well for future spending

With consumers in the US and elsewhere sitting on top of plenty of cash thanks to government handouts and lockdowns, we believe strong consumer spending in the main developed economies will continue. Progressive improvement in employment and rising use of consumer credit should further reinforce this trend.

Pandemic-driven hoarding and fear of bottlenecks focused consumer demand on goods. But as economies have reopened, we believe the composition of demand will increasingly shift towards services.

This revival of spending on services should benefit **value stocks** in industries like tourism and hospitality. We will be monitoring such industries and companies that fell out of favour among investors during the pandemic and remain undervalued. Cyclical value stocks in general are due a revival as the increase in real long-term bond yields diminishes the attractiveness of growth stocks. While we expect tighter monetary policies from major central banks like the Federal Reserve and Bank of England, we do not expect them to derail economic growth in a way that would irreversibly damage the investment case for cyclical value stocks.



A revival of spending on services should benefit value stocks in industries like tourism and hospitality.

4

## THE GREAT RESIGNATION

An oversupply of jobs openings puts upward pressure on inflation and yields

Workers in the US and parts of Europe are leaving their jobs in droves, as a rising number decide to start their own businesses, the baby boomer generation reaches retirement and a general mismatch between labour demand and supply continues. Labour shortages – and a languishing labour participation rate – could continue to drive both inflation and bond yields higher in certain countries.

Taking this into account, we continue to look for companies with **pricing power**. Pricing power means that a business can pass on rising input costs to their end consumers through higher prices, thereby withstanding pressure on margins caused by higher inflation. Typically these are companies with a strong brand, superior product mix and high-quality management that makes their products or services less vulnerable to substitution from competitors.

Real assets like real estate (including logistics centres and select commercial real estate) and infrastructure, which

we prefer to access via **private equity**, should also provide some inflation protection to portfolios. Because they tend to have low correlation with listed markets, in general, private assets can help improve a portfolio's risk/return profile, while also adding a degree of protection against inflation.

**Senior US leveraged loans** are well positioned, too. These loans, which are typically extended to highly levered borrowers, tend to carry a variable rate, which removes duration risk. US leveraged loans also offer a comfortable spread cushion, which should provide some relative protection when the Federal Reserve begins raising interest rates, as we expect in 2022.

As interest rates rise, so should the interest income of financial institutions. This could make income-providing **financial contingent convertibles** (Co Co bonds and AT1s), which offer higher yields than traditional bonds – more attractive from a risk-return perspective.



5

### THE SLOW UNBUNDLING

Policy and macroeconomic decoupling is underway between the US and China

The world’s two biggest economies are drifting further apart across multiple facets. We believe 2022 will see further progression of this dispersion between China and the US in terms of inflation, monetary policies (including the size of central bank balance sheets), Covid policies, growth momentum and strategic priorities. This unbundling will have consequences for developed- and emerging-market assets alike.

Although their earnings dynamics have lagged, **South-east Asian equities** appear well positioned to catch up with their peers outside of the region. Because of their economies’ close ties to China’s, undervalued Southeast Asian equities could also offer investors exposure to any Chinese growth revival, without having to take direct exposure to China.

In the longer run, they could also benefit from the ongoing re-location of major manufacturing facilities away from China. Alternatively, **European companies** with exposure to the Chinese market could also offer investors access to any Chinese economic stimulus efforts. And should that fail to materialise, the fading growth gap between China and Europe will make euro-area equities more attractive on a relative basis.

The unbundling could also extend to the US and Europe. The US economy rebounded more steadily and robustly in 2021, leading the US central bank to turn more hawkish and making the US dollar stronger. This could be an opening for European equities, which offer a significant valuation discount to US equities, even on a sector-adjusted basis.



Southeast Asian equities appear well positioned to catch up with their peers outside of the region.

6

### TOO BIG TO FAIL

China’s economic growth is moderating meaningfully and the deleveraging of its property market will be critical to the Chinese consumer outlook



In China, regulatory crackdowns and the authorities’ moves to rein in overly indebted sectors have triggered considerable economic upheaval. A key focus in 2022 will be on how ongoing issues in the heavily indebted Chinese real estate sector unfold and how those issues impinge on domestic consumption.

Compared to the US, housing-related spending in China accounts for a much larger percentage of personal consumption. At the same time, construction and property-related activity makes up a large share (close to 30% by some estimates) of Chinese gross domestic product (GDP).

These dynamics make the Chinese property sector ‘too big to fail’, and there are already indications that Chinese authorities have taken discreet action to contain damage from the problems incurred at the most highly indebted real-estate companies.

Interestingly, there has been a notable lack of contagion from the real-estate-dominated Chinese high-yield market to the rest of the **Asian credit** universe. We continue to favour Asian credits, given their superior risk-adjusted returns potential (i.e. potential returns per unit or risk taken).

We continue to favour Asian credits, given their superior risk-adjusted returns potential.

7

## WHO PAYS THE BILL?

The implications of massive fiscal spending packages around the world remain relevant

This investment theme from 2021 maintains its relevance as concerns around high private and public indebtedness continue to grow. The challenge of funding the huge cost of the pandemic and the energy transition remain as pertinent as ever.

As governments adopt various measures to address their respective challenges, market correlations in equities could decline. So could the historical correlations between other asset classes. Because of this, we continue to believe in the potential of actively managed **macro hedge fund strategies** that take positions on fixed income, currency and equity markets to generate alpha.

From a top-down perspective, Japanese equities appear favourably positioned in 2022. The recently unveiled Japanese economic stimulus package worth 10% of GDP will boost spending by households that are already sitting on significant amounts of excess cash. We believe Japan will be one of the few major economies where economic growth could accelerate in 2022. This could potentially push returns on **Japanese equities** to catch up to the levels prevailing in other developed markets.



Differing responses to these challenges mean further breakdowns in the correlations between individual markets could be on the horizon.

8

## GREEN MARSHALL PLAN

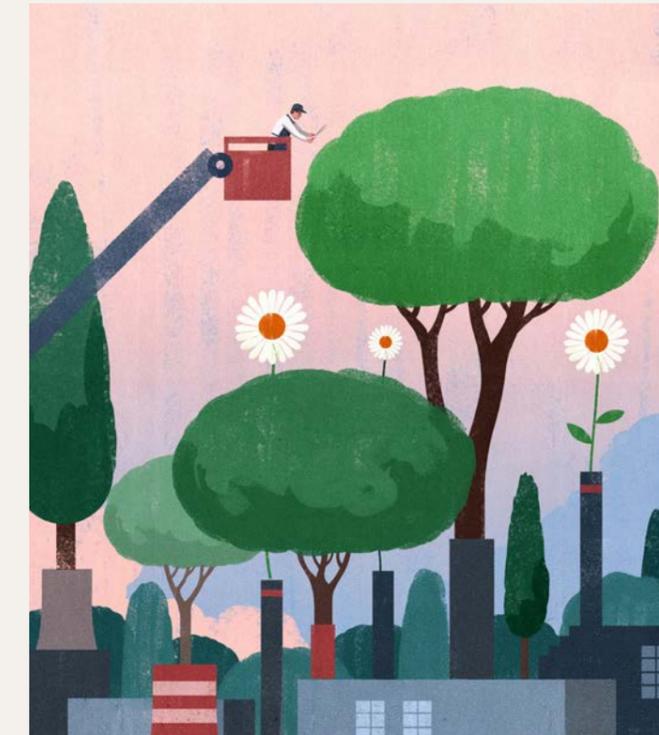
With clean-energy investment lagging, the carbon transition presents investors with both interim and long-term opportunities

In the wake of November's COP26 global conference on climate change, this is another 2021 investment theme that remains relevant. While the challenges posed by global warming are momentous, annual global investment in clean energy must grow exponentially to smooth the transition to net-zero greenhouse gas emissions. Meanwhile, the energy crunch of late 2021 has brought nuclear power (which is not renewable but cleaner from a carbon-emissions perspective than burning fossil fuels) back to the table.

Massive post-pandemic fiscal packages around the world are largely focused on building or modernising various types of **infrastructure**. Government spending bills in the US and EU (The NextGenerationEU plan emphasises facilitating the EU's energy and digital transition) are key examples.

The factors that support this theme also lend themselves favourably to bonds that meet strict ESG (environmental, social and governance) criteria. We closely scrutinise **ESG bonds** that have a focus on renewable energy, pollution reduction or climate change adaptation and that tie the issuer to measurable Sustainable Development Goals.

Massive post-pandemic fiscal packages around the world are largely focused on building or modernising various types of infrastructure.



9

## THE GREAT ESCAPE

Central banks around the world are abandoning loose monetary policies

Like the prisoners of war in the film *The Great Escape*, since the pandemic, central banks have had little room to manoeuvre outside of loose monetary policies. But as economies have recovered and inflation increases, central banks are gradually exiting the current policy framework. Depending on how Covid develops, we expect this trend to continue in 2022, with the US Federal Reserve possibly beginning to raise its policy rates toward the middle of the year.

A higher cost of debt and possible slowdown in corporate and economic growth could ensue as a result. However, we expect nominal short-term interest rates to remain

below inflation for some time, thereby keeping real rates in negative territory.

The number of high-yield issuers upgraded to investment grade (i.e. ‘rising stars’) has outpaced the number of issuers that have been downgraded from investment grade to high yield. We believe that top-quality issues of this kind are well placed to sustain the risk of higher bond yields driven by central bank tightening in 2022. Our focus on ‘**rising stars**’, which personify another kind of ‘Great Escape’, thus remains in place from last year.



We believe that top-quality issues of *rising stars* are well placed to sustain the risk of higher bond yields driven by central bank tightening in 2022.

10

## INCOME REPRESSION CONTINUES

With bond yields below nominal GDP, we are happy to remain underweight government bonds

Policy decisions have driven government bond returns lower than inflation. This income repression looks set to continue if bond yields stay below nominal GDP growth and real rates (nominal interest rates minus inflation) remain low or negative. With the returns outlook for developed-market government bonds set to remain subdued, income-seeking investors must seek alternatives.

In this context, a growing percentage of equities offer dividend yields higher than corporate bond yields. We continue to like ‘**dividend growers**’ – companies that can increase dividend payouts to investors in a sustainable way.

We also see income opportunities in foreign-exchange markets. Tightening monetary policy in countries with sound fundamentals has created a number of **high-quality cyclical currencies** that offer an attractive interest rate for holding them and can provide portfolio diversification benefits.

We continue to like ‘dividend growers’ – companies that can increase dividend payouts to investors in a sustainable way.

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