Advanced Research Investment Solutions (ARIS) is a boutique investment advisory firm located in Beverly Hills, California that utilizes an innovative investment process for a select group of sophisticated family office and institutional clients.

Since its founding in 2014 by Alex Shahidi and Damien Bisserier, Advanced Research Investment Solutions (ARIS) has been recognized with multiple awards, both for the firm and for personal performance. Amongst these accolades, ARIS has appeared on three separate Barron’s lists: America’s Top 1,200 Financial Advisors, America’s Top 100 Independent Advisors and America’s Top 30 Institutional Consultants. Barron’s rankings are based on data provided by individual advisors and their firms, according to Barron’s. ARIS has also appeared on Financial Advisor Magazine’s Top 600 Registered Investment Advisor (RIA) Firms and on the Los Angeles Business Journal’s Top 100 Money Management Firms.

Shahidi brushes off the importance of these acknowledgments to ARIS. “Our

Written by Jessica Ferlaino

A DIFFERENTIATED APPROACH

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goal is to generate the best possible investment outcomes for our clients and to maintain the highest quality relationships. If we execute well, then the accolades may follow. But, the accolades aren’t the reason we do those things.”

The history of the partnership goes back to 2006 when Shahidi and Bisserier originally met. Shahidi was a financial advisor at Merrill Lynch and Bisserier worked as a senior investment associate at Bridgewater Associates, the world’s largest hedge fund. Shahidi, who was one of Bisserier’s clients, managed one of Merrill Lynch’s largest institutional consulting teams. The two quickly struck up a friendship, as both had similar interests and values and a complementary approach to investing. Shahidi’s dedication to studying investments, economies and trends that directly affected market performance immediately set him apart. “That’s a very unique approach in this business,” noted Bisserier. “That really stood out, not only to me but my colleagues at Bridgewater.”

Shahidi wrote a book titled Balanced Asset Allocation (part of the Wiley Finance series), which, as Bisserier noted, “basically framed out his thinking on how to structure a long-term investment portfolio without active management.” The investment strategy, based on Bridgewater founder Ray Dalio’s approach to managing his family trust assets, is rooted in a fundamental understanding of what drives asset class returns and seeks to produce consistent returns through changing economic environments.

In 2014 Shahidi felt that it was time to launch a private firm. “With cash rates near zero and equity valuations approaching historic highs, it was clearly going to be more difficult for clients to achieve attractive results by investing in traditional asset classes,” said Shahidi.

“We would need more tools in our toolkit in order to help our clients continue to earn sufficient returns. I knew that we really needed to have our own firm to have full flexibility to execute on that plan,” he added.

It was at that time that Bisserier planned to move back to Los Angeles for personal reasons. With no Bridgewater office located on the west coast, Bisserier was in search of a new opportunity. “That’s when Alex and I, after discussing the potential of working together for many years, decided to go into business,” he recalled. “In 2014, we started the firm, and we largely maintained the business that Alex had been managing.”

Shahidi had been looking for an investment partner that would challenge him and complement his skillset for many years. “I’m more of a qualitative investor. I like to sit across the table from the managers that we invest with or the people providing insight to us and try to qualitatively assess whether what I’m hearing makes sense and if it’s something that can add value. Damien is more systematic and quantitative,” acknowledged Shahidi. “When you put it together, it’s an extremely powerful combination. “Our sole objective is to achieve the best possible investment results for our clients. We analyze markets, economies and managers on our clients’ behalf,” said Shahidi. “A big part of our strategy is to find the smartest investors in the world and identify ways to capture their unique insight,” explained Bisserier.

Shahidi and Bisserier are also highly motivated by their desire to continually improve their investment understanding and process. The two partners constantly challenge each other by offering critical feedback, questioning assumptions and analyzing new investment ideas.

ARIS’ growth is driven almost exclusively by referrals. “Our thinking is, if you keep improving the investment process and building better portfolios for clients, everything else will take care of itself. That’s the philosophy that I’ve always had, and it has worked well for almost two decades,” said Shahidi.
ARIS offers diversified portfolios by combining investments that are lowly correlated with one another. As Bisserier described, ARIS’ portfolios are “diversified across assets that reliably balance one another in different economic environments, and that is how we are able to minimize losses in the face of economic surprises.” “Our main objective is to try to achieve steady returns for clients, and part of that is appreciating all the things that can go wrong,” Shahidi added. “We spend a lot of time understanding the economy, where we are in different cycles and trying to uncover the many risks that exist.”

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ARIS is prepared for whatever the future will bring, and Shahidi and Bisserier anticipate that there may be challenging times ahead with high debt levels, political uncertainty, and low
expected returns across most asset classes. Bisserier noted that, “Low returns and high risk present challenges to conventional investment approaches that are concentrated in assets that depend on a healthy economy.” In their view, it will be critical for investors to remain balanced to a wide range of potential economic outcomes and incorporate high quality active management where appropriate. Since this approach is less conventional, Shahidi and Bisserier devote considerable time to client education.

Fortunately for the broader investing community, their investment philosophy is not a secret to be hidden from the masses. In fact, Shahidi and Bisserier are in the process of writing a second book that shares their insights around selecting active managers to complement the first book on asset allocation.

“We want to be the best-in-class at what we do, which means to provide the best investment education and outcomes for our clients,” stated Shahidi.

Information on Barron’s rankings obtained from: barrons.com/report/top-financial-advisors

“Advisor data is confirmed via regulatory databases, cross-checks with securities firms and conversations with individual advisors,” according to Barron’s, which uses a proprietary formula to rank advisors. This formula features “three major components: assets managed, revenue produced and quality of practice. Investment returns are not a component of the rankings because an advisor’s returns are dictated largely by the risk tolerance of clients. The quality-of-practice component includes an evaluation of each advisor’s regulatory record,” says Barron’s.
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