7TWELVE

A DIVERSIFIED INVESTMENT PORTFOLIO WITH A PLAN

CRAIG L. ISRAELSEN

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Building rockets is complex. Building a
diversified portfolio shouldn't be.
This book isn't about rockets.

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FOREWORD

I first encountered Craig Israelsen's work on portfolio construction—that is, how to combine investments effectively and systematically so that your assets will grow over time—in 2005, when I became the editor in chief of *Financial Planning* magazine. At first, I found his efforts mystifying—he took a deep, deep dive into decades of performance data, sliced it up, and found patterns I had never encountered. Then, he described what he found in simple English—no flights of calculus or abstruse concepts to make him seem too smart to be questioned. At first, it seemed too simple to me to be as rigorous as it really is.

After a few months, I came to realize that Craig's ideas, like so many great thoughts, seem simple just because they are true. Like many deep insights, his are the kind that make you say to yourself, "Of course—why didn't I think of that before." And after years of intense conversations about the ins and outs of portfolio construction, and invigorating exchanges of research ideas, I am delighted to say that Craig is one of those rare souls who can create intellectual elegance out of chaotic and sometimes contradictory facts. This is what makes his work appear to be so simple, and what makes learning from him such a pleasure.

Which brings me to the subject of this book, *7Twelve,* a collection of investments that can dependably build wealth for an investor's entire life. I think of this portfolio as the culmination of Craig's research. He has taken the many varied techniques of portfolio construction and distilled them into a reasonable, workable system that any individual can execute, either on his or her own or with the help of a financial advisor. Once again, the ease of this system is deceptive, as it integrates the most contemporary research with Craig's own investigations to come up with his ultimate recipe for long-term success.

How does the 7Twelve portfolio work? It molds the confusing world of investments into a system that requires just a little regular upkeep. It is not greedy. It is a collection of mutual funds, index funds, or exchange-traded funds that covers a wide variety of assets, from stocks and bonds to real estate and commodities, so it should enable you to profit when certain assets grow and protect you from losing too much when certain types of assets drop in value.

During the past two years, after the financial markets' near collapse in 2008 and its rocket-powered recovery in 2009 and 2010 (at least so far), people have lost faith in the ability of markets to reflect the true value of things. Money that people saved for years, even decades, disappeared, and much of that vanished wealth never returned. It was a harsh lesson for those who staked their future on the stock market—which was most of us.

It is disappointing but not difficult to understand why real estate prices dropped, and why they have not returned. But why did stocks fall so precipitously, and then rise again so rapidly? Why did they drag down so many other assets, too? How can one protect savings from that kind of disaster without eliminating any possibility of long-term growth?

A widely diversified portfolio that is rebalanced systematically, like the 7Twelve, is a good start toward answering those questions. What's more, the 7Twelve method ratchets down your exposure to market risk as you age, thereby consolidating and protecting your long-term gains.

The 7Twelve method is not rapid-fire and is not designed to get you rich. It may not be exciting. But it is useful, and its clarity and simplicity belie its sophistication. Try it—you just may like it.

Marion Asnes
March 2010

PREFACE

7Twelve™ provides a recipe for building a multi-asset investment portfolio with 12 low-cost mutual funds. The recipe is more important than the ingredients. A poor recipe with good ingredients produces a poor end product. A great recipe with average ingredients produces an acceptable outcome. A great *recipe* with great *ingredients* is the ideal scenario—and this book provides information about both.

Too many investors have portfolios that lack diversification breadth. A few mutual funds that seem different are often cobbled together. 7Twelve, on the other hand, is a diversified, multi-asset portfolio by design.

In addition to providing a recipe for a diversified portfolio, 7Twelve also provides guidance on portfolio management over the entire lifecycle. From our early working years to the years beyond retirement, the 7Twelve portfolio can be adapted to meet our ever-changing personal and family circumstances.

The 7Twelve plan is rich in supporting historical performance data. No conjecture here. No Ph.D. needed either. The information is presented simply so that a person who is relatively new to the field of investing can easily grasp and implement the 7Twelve portfolio recipe.

The 7Twelve will be of value to young investors as they start building their investment portfolios; to middle-aged individuals who need to start ratcheting down the risk of their portfolios as they move closer to retirement; and to retirees who need to ensure that their retirement portfolio is durable and insulated from large losses. Very simply, investors of any age can benefit from the guidance in 7Twelve. Everyone is welcome in this kitchen.

The book is organized into 15 bite-sized chapters. Chapters 1 and 2 introduce the 7Twelve recipe for building a diversified, multi-asset investment portfolio, and Chapter 3 demonstrates how our diversification is actually achieved. Many investors are less diversified than they think.

Chapter 4 introduces various ways to meaningfully measure portfolio performance. Chapter 5 outlines the performance benefits of building a low correlation portfolio. Chapters 6 and 7 focus on the ongoing management of the 7Twelve portfolio—from periodic rebalancing to changes in the asset allocation over the lifecycle.

From there, Chapter 8 addresses the poignant issue of portfolio durability during the retirement years. Chapters 9 and 10 present research results on two much debated investing topics: value versus growth and active versus passive. Chapter 11 sheds light on two very prominent types of mutual funds offered in 401(k) retirement plans: target date funds and balanced funds.

Dilemmas created by undersaving are covered in Chapter 12. And then Chapter 13 investigates the equity premium and how that issue has a huge effect on how investment portfolios are built. Chapter 14 is a summary, outlining mutual funds and exchange-traded funds that could be used as the ingredients in the 7Twelve recipe.

Chapter 15 is the simple, *simple* summary of a straightforward portfolio design.

For the reader who just can't get enough, my website (www.7TwelvePortfolio.com) contains monthly performance updates for the 7Twelve portfolio. In addition, there is downloadable software (an Excel spreadsheet) that allows you to compare the performance of other portfolios to the 7Twelve portfolio over various time periods that you control.

Author's Disclaimer

Past performance of the 7Twelve portfolio is not a guarantee of future performance. This book does not represent investment advice nor is it an investment solicitation.

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My parents, as well as Tammy's parents, have provided a lifelong example of integrity and endurance that has blessed our lives and the lives of our children.

Thanks also to Bob Vaughan, Robert Katz, Bryce Kurfees, and Andy Martin—each helpful in the early development of the 7Twelve portfolio.

7TWELVE

Anciently, and almost cross-culturally, most numbers had an assigned symbolic meaning. So when people heard or read the number seven, for example, they were reminded of ideas of fullness and completion.

—Gaskill, Alonzo, *The Lost Language of Symbolism* (Deseret Book)

CHAPTER 1

A RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

A wise chef follows a good recipe. Likewise, wise investors should have a good recipe they follow when building a portfolio. The 7Twelve Portfolio is that recipe. By following it, investors will build a diversified, multi-asset portfolio.

The 7Twelve portfolio invests in "7" core asset classes (or investment categories) by utilizing "Twelve" underlying mutual funds—hence the name 7Twelve. The 7Twelve portfolio has both depth and breadth. 7Twelve has diversification *depth* within each separate mutual fund, and diversification *breadth* across seven core asset classes.

The 7Twelve Portfolio Recipe

7 Core Asset Classes

12 Underlying Mutual Funds

U.S. Stock	Non-U.S. Stock	Real Estate	Resources	U.S. Bonds	Non-U.S. Bonds	Cash
Large Companies	*Developed Companies*	*Real Estate*	*Natural Resources*	*Aggregate Bonds*	*International Bonds*	*U.S. Cash*
Medium-sized Companies	*Emerging Companies*		*Commodities*	*Inflation-Protected Bonds*		
Small Companies						