*Systems for the Strategic Self*

A new flagship ships, the benchmark chart looks decisive, and you migrate everything to it by Friday. Then latency creeps, the bill doubles on calls that never needed the smartest model, and a capability you relied on regresses in an update you cannot refuse. You run production on one vendor's roadmap and call it simplicity. It is exposure.

The standard move is to pick the best model and standardize on it. That fails because there is no best model, only one that is best for a task, a budget, and a failure tolerance, and those stop agreeing the moment traffic is real.

The Model Portfolio treats your models the way an investor treats capital: assets you allocate on purpose, not one bet you keep doubling. It introduces the PORTFOLIO framework (Profile, Options, Route, Test, Fallback, Iterate), the moves that turn a stack of API keys into a managed system. The framework is the structure; the model you favor this quarter is weather. When the leaderboard turns over, your architecture holds.

You will learn to:

- Profile each task by what it demands (accuracy, latency, cost, privacy), not by which model launched loudest.
- Route requests to the cheapest model that clears the bar, and escalate only when the work earns it.
- Test models against your own evals and traffic, not a benchmark someone else's data won.
- Build fallback and redundancy so a deprecation, outage, or silent regression degrades gracefully instead of taking you down.
- Manage the portfolio as a position (measured, rebalanced, version-pinned), so capability compounds and spend stays controlled.

The result is concrete: you stop overpaying a frontier model for work a smaller one does well, you stop being hostage to one provider's release notes, and your system grows cheaper and more resilient over time.

If you run more than one model in production and refuse to confuse a default with a decision, this was written for the operator who treats capability as an allocation, not a habit.

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Len P. van der Hof The Model Portfolio

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# The Model *Portfolio*

How to route, mix, and govern LLMs like a strategic asset allocator

## Len P. van der Hof

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