Which vs. That

Relative clauses are types of dependent clauses. They have subjects and verbs, but are not able to stand alone in a sentence. They are used to present more detail about a noun. There are two types of relative clauses.

Restrictive clauses provide information that is necessary to the meaning of the sentence. They are normally introduced by the words *that* or *who/whom/whose* and never have commas because they cannot be set apart from the rest of the sentence without changing the overall meaning.

*The paper that I wrote yesterday* is due tonight at ten, but the one due tomorrow is not done yet.
*The man was jogging along the road that connects to Sunshine Boulevard.*
*I want to share my snack with someone who will appreciate my kind gesture.*

The first sentence talks about multiple papers, so it is important to have the clause state which paper the speaker is talking about. This first example is a restrictive clause. The second sentence is clarifying the road that the man jogs on, so to make sense of which road the man is on, the clause is also necessary. The third sentence specifies who the speaker wants to share a lunch with. She doesn’t want to share it with just anyone; she wants someone who will appreciate it, so the clause is restrictive as well.

Nonrestrictive clauses provide information that can be removed from the sentence without making the object they describe less clearly defined. These are normally introduced by the words *which* or *who/whom/whose* and are always separated from the rest of the sentence by commas because they can be taken out without confusing the audience.

*The book, which was well written, talks about the Battle of Little Big Horn.*
*The man playing the trombone, which looks rusty, sounds very professional.*
*I want to share my snack with someone nice, who is unlikely to glare at me while eating.*

The first sentence discusses what the book talks about, but the fact that it is well written is not important to the meaning in the rest of the sentence, so this is a nonrestrictive clause. The second sentence is the same. The trombone player is important to the meaning of the sentence, but the clause about the trombone looking...
rusty isn’t necessary. It can be taken out without changing the meaning of the overall sentence. The final sentence shows that the speaker wants to share her snack with someone nice. It is just an added detail that this nice person is unlikely to glare at her. Like the previous two examples, this one is also a nonrestrictive clause.