The work of Tezuka Architects has always had an ingenious, playful twist. Roof House (AR October 2001) gave us the naughty-but-nice example of the balustrade-free sloping roof terrace, subsequently copied by many misguided European students where the idea would be completely unworkable. The twist in the tail of their snake-like Natural Science Museum (AR August 2004) was the use of 75mm thick acrylic windows to retain smothering snowdrifts. And, more recently, the Big Window House completed in Yokohama, recalls Mies’ Tugendhat House with its massive felony glass wall (main photograph, Delight, p98).

Here then, with the completion of the Engawa House in Tokyo, a gravity-defying slot window creates a unique relationship between two neighbouring homes.

Built on land adjacent to their grandparents’ home, opportunistically purchased when put on the market, the house is simple in form: a 4.62m x 4.4m x 3.5m high timber box. This new form not only provides living accommodation for the grandparents and her husband (while the older brother lives above the grandparents in the adjacent property), but also vastly improves the existing house’s outlook, previously hemmed in by a boundary wall sited just 500mm from its windows. Now, the two dwellings share a narrow but rare strip garden, bringing the obvious shared benefits of light, air, and privacy.

Linear in plan, the narrow single volume form establishes a simple duality in section, with the street buffered by a continuous 2.2m high storage wall (that also neatly conceals the entrance door) and clerestory lighting above. The horizontal datum this creates is then projected across the space (via a transverse storage wall and bathroom pod) to